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Every day a blacksmith came and beat with a hammer to silence the gnat

The BOOK of LEGENDS V.3

TALES FROM THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH

BY
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AUTHOR OF
"MISHNAH", "HOLIDAY TALES",
"THREE KINGS", ETC.

TALMUDIC PERIOD

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מִשְׁכַּן אֱבֹרֹת

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THE BOOK OF LEGENDS

VOLUME III

CHAPTER I

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

1. *His Birth*



NCE there ruled a mighty king in Egypt whose name was Niktanibor. This king possessed great wisdom, and he was the chief of all the Egyptian magicians.

One day he was informed that Artaxerxes, king of Persia, was preparing to wage war against Egypt. Niktanibor dispatched his trustworthy men to investigate the truth of the report, and also to ascertain how big an army the king of Persia had mustered.

In the meantime, Niktanibor entered his private chambers, filled a brass basin with rain water, put into it leaves of a palm tree, and began to ascertain by his magic power whether he would prevail over the king of Persia. Before Niktanibor completed his divinations, one of his generals came in and informed him that the report was true.

"And who are they that make up Artaxerxes' armies?" inquired the king.

"All the people of Persia and Media, and of many other nations have joined to wage war against us," stated the frightened general.

"Thousands of sheep cannot put one lion to flight, and one lion does not retreat when he meets thousands of sheep," said the king to the general.

Niktanibor then continued his divinations. He drew pictures of Egyptian chariots and horsemen and of Persian chariots and horsemen, and put them into the magic waters of the basin. He then took hold of the palm leaves, and began practicing his witchcraft. He discovered to his great disappointment that the Egyptian chariots and horsemen were destined to be defeated by the Persian chariots and horsemen.

Alarmed over his fate, Niktanibor thought: "The best thing for me to do is to escape." He arose at midnight, shaved his head, beard and eyelashes and put on old clothes. Taking with him gold and precious stones, he secretly left his palace and his capital city.

When he arrived in Antiochia, he cast off his old clothes, put on the robes of a Babylonian priest, and then set out for Macedonia. There he became acquainted with the wise men, he soon was acknowledged by them as the wisest man of Macedonia, and his fame spread far and wide.

Once Philip, king of Macedonia, was away waging war against his enemies, and Niktanibor introduced himself to the queen.

"Are you the man of whom it is said there is nothing hidden from you?" asked the queen.

"It is your humble servant," answered Niktanibor.

"Tell me, then," said the queen, "what is going to happen to me in the future."

"I have very cheerful information to give you," said the disguised Egyptian king. "One of the Egyptian gods has fallen in love with you, and from him a son will be born to you, who will be the wisest and the mightiest of all kings."

"Show me that god, so that I may know that you speak the truth," demanded the curious queen.

"I shall grant your request," said the magician.

In the evening, when the stars appeared in heaven, Niktanibor assumed the form of a terrible monster and appeared before the queen. The queen was greatly terrified when she beheld the monster, but the creature addressed her with these words: "Be not alarmed, O beautiful queen. I am the Egyptian god of whom the old wizard has spoken to thee this day."

One day while Philip, king of Macedonia, was sitting on his throne, he fell into a deep slumber and dreamt that a little bird fell upon his lap, and laid an egg. The egg rolled off his lap and broke, and out of it came forth a tiny snake. The snake was about to go back into its shell, when it suddenly weakened and died.

The king awoke from his dream in a fright. At

once, he summoned his wise men and his magicians. He told them of his dream and said: "Now tell me the meaning of it."

The wise men interpreted the king's dream thus: "A son will be born to the queen who will conquer and rule all nations, but before he will be able to return to his native land, he shall become ill and die."

Just as Niktanibor and the wise men had foretold, a son was born to the queen of Macedonia. The child resembled neither his father nor his mother, for the hair of his head was like that of a lion, his right eye was black while his left eye was blue, his teeth were very large and his voice resembled the fearful lowing of an ox. This peculiar looking babe was named Alexander.

2. *The Death of Niktanibor*

When Alexander was but five years old, he was able to read and write, and in a very short time he became noted for his quick understanding. King Philip chose Niktanibor to instruct the young prince in all manner of wisdom.

One day Alexander said to Niktanibor: "Tell me, pray, how you are able to read the thoughts of man."

"It is because I am an astrologer and an enchanter," answered Niktanibor.

"Are you then able to tell me what will happen to you in your later days?" asked the young prince.

"I know that my days on this earth are but few; and that my own son will take my life," stated the wizard.

One day, Niktanibor and the youthful prince Alexander left the palace and went for a walk beyond the city into the forest. As they were passing a pit, Niktanibor remarked to Alexander: "Look at the planet Saturn and notice how its brightness is continually growing dimmer; now look at the planet Jupiter, and notice that its light is continually growing stronger."

As their eyes were raised heavenward to look at the stars, the youthful prince pushed Niktanibor into the pit. The prince then said to Niktanibor: "I have been harboring the thought of bringing harm upon you for many days, and now the opportunity has presented itself. All these years you have brought disgrace upon the king and the queen by disclosing their family secrets. Now you certainly shall receive the punishment you deserve."

"O Alexander," cried the Egyptian magician with tears in his eyes, "you can now see that my prophecy has come true: my own son has put me to death."

"Am I then your son, and you my father?" asked the astonished Alexander.

"That is indeed the truth," answered Niktanibor, "but ask me no further questions, for they shall remain unanswered."

Alexander, infuriated by the words of Niktani-bor, cast a big stone into the pit, causing the death of the helpless magician.

3. *The First War Waged by Alexander*

A neighboring king once presented King Philip of Macedonia with a horse. The horse would permit no one to approach it, and any one who dared come near it met with death. At the king's order, the horse, which was named Butsefall, was enclosed in an iron cage. When a Macedonian deserved capital punishment, he was thrown into the iron cage, where he was torn to pieces by the dread horse.

One night, King Philip dreamt that one of the gods appeared to him and told him that the one who would be able to ride on Butsefall would reign in Macedonia after the death of Philip.

By the time Prince Alexander reached the age of fifteen, he was already famous throughout the land for his wisdom and courage. One day, he happened to pass by the cage where Butsefall was enclosed, and, noticing in the cage the skulls and the bones of human beings, he became very angry. He thrust his hand between the iron bars of the cage, with the intention of taking hold of the neck of the deadly horse and choking it. But as soon as Alexander laid his hand upon the neck of Butsefall, the horse put out its tongue and licked the hand that had intended to kill it. The prince at

once ordered that the cage be opened, and he mounted the now docile horse. Alexander would ride upon Butsefall wherever and whenever he pleased. King Philip was greatly pleased, and said: "Now I see that my dream has turned out to be true."

One day, Alexander said to the king: "Entrust me with an army, and furnish me with provisions, and I will go out and fight your battles."

The king gave Alexander forty thousand silver shekels and one hundred mighty horsemen. Thereupon Alexander mounted upon Butsefall, and led his men forth from the city. On the road, he met Nicholas, the king of Andriyus, with a very powerful army. King Nicholas asked Alexander: "Who are you?"

"I am Alexander, the son of the great King Philip," answered the prince proudly.

"Do you not know who I am, that you speak so haughtily to me?" asked King Nicholas.

"Yes, I know who you are," said Alexander; "you are Nicholas, king of Andriyus."

"Then you had better run for your life, if life is dear to you," threatened Nicholas.

"And you had better get away from this spot, or you shall regret it," said the prince, undaunted.

King Nicholas became very indignant at the reply of Alexander, spat in the face of the prince, and said: "This is what a fool and imbecile of your type deserves."

But Alexander displayed no anger. He simply said to the king: "Let us appoint a definite day when your armies and mine may meet in open battle, and then you will have the opportunity to ascertain who is the dog and who is the lion."

On the day set by Nicholas and Alexander for the battle, they and their armies met and engaged in combat. Alexander defeated Nicholas, captured the king, put him to death by the sword, and took possession of his land. He removed the crown from the head of Nicholas and brought it to Macedonia as a token of his first victory in war. The king and all the people of Macedonia were very much delighted by the heroism of their youthful prince.

4. *The Death of Philip*

Once Darius, the king of Persia, sent his ambassadors to Philip to collect the tribute which Philip paid to Darius every year. Philip said to the ambassadors: "Thus shall you say to your king: 'When Philip was childless, he had a hen which laid golden eggs, now that a son was born to him, the hen has stopped laying the golden eggs.'"

At that time, the Armenians rebelled against Philip and refused to pay him tribute, just as Philip had rebelled against Persia. Prince Alexander went with his army to suppress the revolt in Armenia. But in the meantime, King Kharabagness gathered a large army and invaded Macedonia. Kharabagness defeated Philip, and the

king of Macedonia fell off his horse and was severely wounded. Thereupon Kharabagness took possession of the capital city, and was about to take the queen captive. But the queen kept herself in hiding until aid should come.

When Alexander returned from his victory over the Armenians, he learned of the defeat of his father in the war with Kharabagness, and of the terrible plight of his mother. The victorious prince at once marched with his troops against the invader of his land, defeated the enemy and scattered him in all directions. Alexander then hunted for his father's body, and while searching he exclaimed: "Where are you, O father; I am deeply grieved over your fate."

"Is that you, O my beloved son?" said a feeble voice from the midst of the slain that were strewn on the battle-field. "I die in peace, since you are alive to avenge my death." Uttering a deep and heavy sigh, Philip, king of Macedonia, died.

Upon the death of Philip, Alexander ascended the throne. He was then a young man of barely twenty years of age. Standing before his admiring warriors, he made a vow not to sheathe his sword until his feet had waded in the blood of those who had slain his father.

5. Alexander Beyond the Dark Mountains

Alexander conquered many lands, and during his campaign he came to the Land of the South, where lived many wise men. Alexander said to

the elders of the land: "I will ask you ten questions, and if you answer them all to my satisfaction, I will spare your land." The elders answered the ten questions to the satisfaction of Alexander, and they were rewarded by the conquering king with many rich gifts. Alexander then expressed his desire to visit Africa, and the wise men of the Land of the South said to him: "How can you ever come to that land when the entrance is barred by the Dark Mountains?"

"Well then, what is your advice?" asked Alexander.

"We would advise you," said the wise men of the South, "that every one of your men be provided with a Libyan ass that can see in the dark. When you approach the Dark Mountains, tie long ropes around the necks of the asses, then hold on to the end of the ropes, and the asses will lead you and your men safely across the mountains."

Alexander accordingly provided all his men with Libyan asses, and following the advice of the wise men of the South safely crossed the Dark Mountains. They came to a city called Kartigna, from which the male inhabitants fled in fright at the approach of Alexander the Great, and the city was guarded by women only.

The inhabitants of the city sent a delegation to Alexander, saying: "If you, O mighty ruler, wage war against us and defeat us, then people will laugh and say, 'Is not Alexander a brave warrior:

he has defeated an army made up of women.' If, on the other hand, we defeat you in battle, then people will ridicule you and say, 'Alexander the Great was defeated by women.' "

Alexander agreed that it was unwise to wage war against women, and, before departing from the city with his men, he wrote on the gates of Kartigna: "I, Alexander the Great, was a fool until I came to this city and learned wisdom from women."

6. *Alexander and King Katsia*

Alexander next came to a land ruled over by a certain king named Katsia. He sent ambassadors to King Katsia with this message: "I, Alexander, king of Macedonia, desire that you and your courtiers come out to meet me peacefully."

King Katsia came forth with his courtiers to meet Alexander. He brought along with him some golden apples, golden pomegranates, and golden bread, all set upon a golden table, and presented these to the invading king.

"Why, do then people live on gold in your land?" asked Alexander, rather surprised.

King Katsia answered: "Is it then that you lack bread or fruit in your own land that you have taken the trouble to cross the Dark Mountains, and wander to the very ends of the earth? I suppose it is the gold that you are after, and therefore I have brought you gold."

'Abashed, Alexander said: "I have no need for your gold; I have come to see your mode of life, and how you administer justice."

King Katsia then invited Alexander to sit with him in his court of law, where the king was the chief judge.

One day two men came to the king to have him decide their dispute. One of the men said: "O sire, I bought a piece of land from this man, and as I dug in the ground, I found a hidden treasure. Now, I have bought only the land from this man and not his treasure. I offered to return the treasure to him, but he refused to take it from me."

"And what have you to say?" asked King Katsia.

"I claim," said the other, "that I sold the land and everything that goes with it, and that the treasure belongs to the buyer and not to me."

"Have you an unmarried son or daughter?" asked the king of the first man.

"Yes, sire, I have an unmarried daughter," answered the first man.

"And have you an unmarried son?" asked the king of the second man.

"Yes, sire, I have an unmarried son."

"Well then," said the king, "my verdict is that your children get married to each other and that this treasure be given to them as their wedding gift."

After the two men left the presence of the king, Alexander expressed astonishment at the judgment of the king. Katsia asked: "How would you have decided the case, if it had been brought to you in your own land?"

"If a case like that came up before me for decision," said Alexander, "I would confiscate the treasure for the king, and the two litigants I would send to a lunatic asylum, for that is where they belong."

"Is the sun shining down upon you in your land? Do you have rain in your land?" asked the king in astonishment.

"Yes, we have both sunshine and rain in our land," answered Alexander.

"Are there any cattle in your country?" asked the king again.

"O yes, we have plenty of cattle, too," said Alexander.

"It is clear then," said the king, "that the sun shines not for your sake but for that of the cattle."

7. The Mysterious Eye

On his return from the land of King Katsia, Alexander and his men camped near a brook. When some of the soldiers washed their salted fish in the water of the brook, the fish came to life again. Alexander was not a little surprised when he heard the report of this miracle. He scented

the odor of the water, and it resembled the scent of the water of the Garden of Eden. When he washed his face and hands with the water, he became invigorated and refreshed, and a very pleasant feeling came over him, the like of which he had never known before.

Alexander's curiosity was aroused and he resolved to walk to the source of the brook so that he might have a glimpse of the Garden of Eden. He followed the stream until he reached the gates of the Garden of Eden, but to his disappointment they were locked. He knocked at the gates, and called: "Pray open the gates that I may enter."

"These gates belong to God," came the reply from within; "only the righteous may enter them."

"I would like at least to have some sort of souvenir," pleaded Alexander, "so that people will believe me when I say that I was at the gates of the Garden of Eden."

He was given a human eye as a souvenir, and Alexander, puzzled, put the eye into his bag and said to himself: "When I return home I shall ask the sages of the Land of Israel to explain to me the meaning of this eye."

When Alexander returned to Macedonia, he summoned the Jewish sages and he said to them: "This eye was given to me at the gates of the Garden of Eden; now I want you to tell me the meaning of it."

"In order to know its meaning," replied the

sages, "it is necessary to put it upon the balance and ascertain its weight."

"Why is that necessary?" asked the king. "Even without putting it upon the balance, I know that one quarter of a shekel will outweigh it."

"O mighty king," said the sages, "put then a golden shekel on one side of the balance and the eye on the other, and see which outweighs the other."

The king put the eye on one scale and a golden shekel on the other, but the eye outweighed the shekel. He added more and more shekels, but still the eye outweighed the gold. The curious king then ordered that all the gold in the treasury be put on the scale, but still the eye weighed more.

"Even if the scales should be made so large that you could put on them all your horses and all your wealth, the eye would weigh more," remarked the sages.

"Pray tell me then the explanation of this mystery," the king requested.

"This is the human eye that never knows satiety or contentment," answered the sages.

"Prove to me that what you say is true," said the king.

"We will prove that to you," said the sages. "O king, order your men to remove the entire weight of gold from the scale of the balance, and to place upon it a handful of earth."

When the handful of earth was placed on the

scale, it outweighed the eye. Alexander then said: "Now I understand the meaning of the eye. When a man is alive, all the wealth and glory in the world do not suffice him, for his eye covets more and more; but when he is dead and buried, and turned to dust, his eye can see no longer and ceases to be covetous." Thereupon Alexander said to the elders of Judah: "You certainly deserve the reputation you enjoy as wise men." So saying, he gave them many costly gifts.

8. *Alexander in Jerusalem*

At that time, there was a high priest in the Temple at Jerusalem whose name was Simon. He was known by all the people as "Simon the Just," because of his great piety and meekness. One day, Simon the Just was informed that Alexander the Great was marching with his mighty army toward Jerusalem, with the intention of destroying the Temple. The high priest and the inhabitants of Judea prayed to God for salvation, and spent many days in fasting.

On the day Alexander was to make his entry into Jerusalem, Simon the Just put on his priestly garments, and, accompanied by all the priests, likewise dressed in their priestly robes, and by all the nobles of Judea, he went out to meet Alexander. The priests and nobles marched all night, and when dawn arose, they were detected by Alex-

ander and his men. Alexander asked his officers: "Who are these people that are coming to meet us at this early time in the morning?"

"These are the priests of Judea," answered the officers.

When the procession of the priests drew closer, and Alexander beheld the countenance of Simon the Just, he alighted from his chariot and bowed before the high priest of Judea.

"O sire," exclaimed Alexander's officers in great astonishment. "Is it fitting for the mighty conqueror of the world to bow before the high priest of such a small insignificant land as Judea?"

"Come, and I will disclose a secret to you," said Alexander to his men. "You well know that during the many wars we have fought, it has happened many times that our enemies prevailed over us, and we were almost defeated. At times I believed that we should all be lost. But always, in the midst of such despair, there appeared to me an angel, who gave me a great deal of courage and enabled me to overcome all obstacles. Even during the last war, when we battled against nations who outnumbered us many times, and who were mightier than we, this angel appeared to me. At the sight of him I would become a new man, and I would fear nothing. The courage given me by the angel is the real reason for the success of our campaigns. Now this high priest of Judea looks

exactly like the angel who has always inspired me with courage; and it is certainly not below my dignity to bow to him."

"Certainly not," said all the officers, and they themselves bowed before Simon the Just.

"What is your request, godly man?" asked Alexander when he came near to Simon the Just.

"My request is that you spare my people and our Temple," said the high priest.

Alexander then made a treaty of peace with Simon the Just and agreed to spare the Temple and the people of Israel. And, after Alexander had gone through the Temple, he said to Simon: "I would like my image placed in the Temple near the altar, since the Temple is considered so holy and important by your people."

"We would very much like to grant your request, O mighty king," said Simon the Just. "But our God has commanded us in His Law not to place any image whatsoever in His Temple. To prove to you that we honor and esteem you, and that we refuse your request not because of disrespect to you, we will do something else for you, a thing that has never been done by us before. Every male child that will be born during this year shall be named 'Alexander' after you and in your honor. Then the name Alexander will remain among the Israelites as long as they exist."

Alexander was very much pleased with this token of honor, and he thanked the high priest.

The Ethiopians, who were envious of the Jews, appeared before Alexander while he was still in Jerusalem, and said: "O mighty king! The Jews do not in reality respect and love you as they pretend to do. They simply speak thus with their mouths, but in their hearts they hate and despise you."

"How can you prove to me that you speak the truth?" asked the king.

"We can prove it to you," said the Ethiopians. "Request the priests that they permit you to enter the Holy of Holies in their Temple. Then if your request be granted, sire, and you are permitted to enter, our statement is false, and you can punish us by putting us to death. But should they refuse your request, O sire, then our statement is proven to be true, and it is not worth while to spare the people and their Temple."

Alexander immediately made the request of Simon the Just that he be permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. The news spread among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and it caused consternation among them.

At that time there lived in Jerusalem a hump-backed person, whose name was G'biah ben P'sisa. When he heard of Alexander's request, he said to Simon the Just: "Let Alexander the Great come, and I will take care of him, when he is about to enter the Holy of Holies."

G'biah ordered a pair of boots studded with all

kinds of precious stones. When Alexander came in front of the Temple, G'biah said to him: "The floor of the Temple is very slippery. So, put these special boots on, O king, and you will be sure of your footing when you enter."

The king put on the boots, and he thought: "How these men respect me! They have studded with the most precious stones the boots they offer me to wear."

When Alexander entered the Temple, G'biah placed himself before the entrance to the Holy of Holies, and said: "Any stranger, other than the high priest, who enters this place, shall surely meet with death. And even the high priest is permitted to enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement."

This statement hurt the pride of Alexander, and he exclaimed: "I thought that this hunch-back would lead me into the Holy of Holies; now when I come near it, he tells me that I shall die if I enter. I will kick him in the hump and straighten his back out for him."

"O sire," said the undaunted G'biah, "if you do that for me, you shall become a famous physician, and receive a great reward for your excellent work."

The witty repartee appeased the anger of the king, who smiled and left the Temple without any further comment.

9. *The Claims of the Ishmaelites, Canaanites,
and Egyptians*

While Alexander, king of Macedonia, was still in Jerusalem, the Ishmaelites appeared before him and made complaint against the Jews: "It is written in the Law of the Jews that Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, and that Ishmael was the first-born. It is further written there that the first-born is entitled to two shares in the estate left by his father. According to this law, we are entitled to two-thirds of the land now occupied by them."

Alexander summoned the sages of Israel to answer the claim of the Ishmaelites. The sages were greatly alarmed when they heard of the complaint of the Ishmaelites, but G'biah said: "Permit me to go to the king to make answer to the Ishmaelites. Should I lose, the people will say that the Jews lost because they were represented by an ignorant man like G'biah. Should I win, people will say, 'Behold, even the most ignorant of the people was able to defeat the Ishmaelites,' and our honor will be all the greater."

When G'biah heard the argument advanced by the Ishmaelites, he said: "O king, since these people base their claim on what is written in our Law, then let them take notice of what is further written there: 'And Abraham gave all that he

possessed to Isaac, and to the sons of the concubines, Abraham gave presents and he sent them away from his presence.' Now will any one contend that a father may not dispose of his property as he sees fit?"

The Ishmaelites remained silent, for they knew not what to say, and Alexander said: "What reply will you make to the words of G'biah?"

"O king, pray give us three days' time within which to make answer," pleaded the Ishmaelites. The three days of grace were granted to the representatives of the Ishmaelites, but during that time they fled from Jerusalem, fearing the wrath of Alexander.

One day, representatives of the Canaanites came before Alexander while he was still in Jerusalem and advanced their claim: "The land where the Jews live belonged to our father Canaan, and they took it by force from his descendants. O king, order this people to restore the land to us, for it is rightly ours."

"What have you to say for the Jews?" Alexander asked G'biah ben P'sisa, who had come, as on the previous occasion, to represent the Jews.

"How can they maintain that the land once belonged to their father Canaan?" asked G'biah.

"It is so stated in your Book of the Law," said the Canaanites.

"If you base your claim on what is stated in the

Torah," said G'biah, "then you must also note what is further written there, 'And Noah said, "Cursed be Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brethren." ' Now, O king, these slaves have refused to serve their masters all these years, and they certainly deserve to be punished. All their property should be turned over to their masters; for whatever is possessed by the slave belongs to his master."

"What can you say in your defense?" asked Alexander the Great.

"O mighty king, pray give us three days' time in which to make answer," pleaded the Canaanites. The king granted them their request, but in the meantime the Canaanites fled to their land in great terror.

The Egyptians, too, appeared before Alexander the Great, while he stayed in Jerusalem, and made complaint against the Jews: "It is plainly recorded in their Book of the Law, that they borrowed vessels of silver and gold and costly garments from the Egyptians, and they have failed to return them. Now we petition the king that he order them to restore all these articles to us."

As on the two previous occasions, G'biah ben P'sisa came to defend his people, and Alexander said to him: "What have you to say for your people against this claim?"

"It is stated in our Book of the Law," said

G'biah, "that the number of the people who left Egypt was six hundred thousand; and that the number of years that these people slaved in Egypt was four hundred and thirty. These people received no reward of any kind for the work they did while in Egypt. Now if the Egyptians will agree to pay us for the work done by six hundred thousand Israelites for four hundred and thirty years, we will restore to them all the vessels and garments we had taken from them."

"That is fair," said Alexander the Great, and he ordered his secretaries to figure out how much was due from the Egyptians to the Jews for their work. But it was not an easy task. It took the secretaries days to complete only a part of the figuring, and in the meantime the Egyptians took to their heels.

10. *Alexander in India*

After some time, Alexander marched with his army to wage war against India. When the king of India learned of the intentions of Alexander, he sent word to him, saying: "Do not dare enter my land, or I shall wipe you off the face of the earth." But Alexander refused to heed the warning of the king of India, and he approached the borders of India.

The king of India prepared for war. He mustered his army, which consisted not only of thousands of heroic warriors but also of many elephants

and wild beasts trained for war. Alexander the Great was very much worried when he was informed that the king of India used wild beasts in his army, for he never had the experience of fighting such warriors. He therefore decided to spy out the army of India.

Putting away his royal robes and clothing himself in the uniform of a soldier, Alexander marched straight into the camp of the enemy. There he was brought before the king, who asked him: "Who are you?" and Alexander said: "I am a soldier in Alexander's army, where I have served for many years; but I have been mistreated by my superiors, and therefore I have surrendered to my king's enemies."

Alexander was permitted to remain in the camp of the Indian king, and there he became acquainted with the officers of the army. Distributing gifts lavishly among the officers, he soon gained their confidence and friendship. One day he said to the Indian officers: "When I see these wild beasts in the army, I rejoice immensely, for I know that Alexander knows not how to fight against them. But I fear that shrewd and skilled as he is, he may overcome these ferocious beasts, and destroy your men."

"You have no reason to fear," the officers assured him; "for the wild beasts are very brave and ferocious; nothing in the world can terrify them and put them to flight. The only thing they fear is

the sight of fire, and since Alexander does not know this secret, you have no cause to worry."

In the dark of night, Alexander left the Indian camp and returned to his own army. He called his officers together and said to them: "There is but one way we can defeat the enemy. We must make copper images of men, fill them with torches and hot coals, and place them in front of our troops."

When the two armies met in war, the wild beasts charged the copper images, but when they approached the figures and were scorched, they uttered wild cries, and fled toward the desert. The two armies then began fighting, and Alexander was victorious in the first onslaught; but his horse Butsefall fell dead in that encounter, and soon the tide of battle turned against him. The Indians gained the upper hand, and there was fierce fighting for three days.

Alexander's men, fearing to face the enemy any longer, planned to revolt, kill Alexander and surrender to the Indian king. Alexander was informed of the plot in the nick of time, whereupon he sent the following message to the king of India: "Why should our valiant men fight needlessly? Let the two of us meet in single combat. If I prevail over you, then you and your men shall be my subjects, and if you prevail over me, then we shall become your subjects."

The king of India willingly accepted Alexan-

der's challenge, for compared to Alexander, the Indian king had the stature of a giant, and he thought that he would gain an easy victory. When the two kings stepped forward between the two warring camps to fight their duel, the Indians, desiring to express their confidence in their king, uttered a wild yell. The king of India turned around to ascertain the cause of the outcry, and while his back was turned, he was attacked and killed by Alexander. The Indians scattered in all directions, and Alexander took possession of their land.

11. *In the Land of the Abdamim*

Once Alexander was informed that the Abdamim were a very wise people, and he decided to visit them. When he came to the borders of the land of the Abdamim, the inhabitants sent a delegation to him with this petition: "Why do you come to invade our land? You can find no booty in our land, for we are very poor. We have no garments to cover our bodies, and our dwellings are humble huts and caves."

"It is not my desire to carry away booty from your land," answered Alexander. "I wish merely to learn wisdom from you."

"If you desire only to learn wisdom," said the messengers, "why do you bring your entire army into our land? Come yourself to us, and you may learn as much as your heart desires."

Alexander then took three of his bravest officers and entered the land of the Abdamim. He was amazed at their simple mode of life. He asked them many questions which they answered to his satisfaction. Pleased with the knowledge he had gained, Alexander said to them: "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"There is one thing we would like to ask of you," they said; "give us everlasting life."

"If I could bestow such a gift," replied Alexander, "then I would present it to myself."

"If you are aware that you a mortal just as we are," they said, "why do you strive to conquer lands that belong not to you and to enrich yourself by booty? Do you think that you will take all that you have acquired by bloodshed with you into the grave?"

Alexander answered them thus: "Behold, even the trees of the forest and the billows of the ocean know no rest! How much more should it be true of the man who possesses life and the knowledge to differentiate between good and evil? How can I remain inactive, when it is not the will of God?"

12. *Alexander on Eagle's Wings*

One day Alexander thought: "I must perform some act which no other mortal has done before. If I only conquer lands and subdue kings, then people will say, 'There have been many kings besides Alexander, who have conquered lands and

subdued kings.' I must therefore do something which no other king has ever done." He ordered that the largest eagles that could be found be brought to him, and from the many large eagles that were brought, he selected the largest and the strongest, and commanded that no food be given to it for two days.

When the two days were over, Alexander stuck a large piece of meat on the point of his spear, and sat on the back of the eagle. He kept the point of his spear raised upward, and the hungry eagle, anxious to get a bite of the meat, kept on soaring higher and higher, until it reached the very clouds.

Alexander then looked down toward the earth, but everything on it had disappeared from his view. He saw nothing but tiny little dots scattered here and there over the earth. And Alexander boasted and said: "Has there been any mortal before me who performed a feat like this?" And he looked down again, and he saw the earth in the shape of a big globe, but could discern nothing on it. Then his pride vanished. "For," said he to himself, "just as my men have disappeared from my view and are insignificant to me, so in all probability I have disappeared from their view, and they do not even think of me."

He then turned the meat on the spear downwards, and the eagle began to fly toward the earth. Alexander rejoiced at the sight of his country and

of his army as they grew larger and larger the nearer he drew to them. "For," said he, "as they grow larger and mightier in my sight, so do I grow larger and mightier in their sight."

When Alexander landed safely on the earth, he ordered that an image be made, representing him as holding a globe in his hand, to signify that he ruled over the whole earth, which is shaped like a globe.



Alexander sat on the back of the eagle

CHAPTER II

SIMON THE JUST—SEPTUAGINT

1. *The Fair-looking Nazarite*



ONE day a young man visited Simon the Just. The youth was so handsome that the high priest was astonished at his beauty. The curls on the youth's head were especially beautiful. The young man addressed the high priest thus: "I have taken the vow of a Nazarite before the Almighty God, and now I have come here that you may cut off the locks of my hair, in accordance with the vow I have taken."

"My son," said the high priest to the youth, "God is not at all pleased with a person who vows to abstain from things we are permitted to enjoy according to His law. In fact He considers it a crime to take the vow of a Nazarite, and therefore He has ordered that any one who happens to make such a vow, must bring an offering to Him when the days of his vow are over. Now, my son, what reason did you have to take such a vow?"

"Rabbi," said the youth candidly, "I shall give

you the reason for my vow. Until recently I had never looked into a mirror, and therefore I was not acquainted with my own appearance. But not very long ago, I happened to be drawing water from a well, and in the clear water of the well I beheld the reflection of my countenance. I then became very proud of my extremely fair appearance, and I could hear Satan say to me, 'Young fellow, enjoy thy youthful years, follow the inclinations of thy heart and the lust of thine eyes, for God will not punish thee.' Suddenly I beheld the most ravishing scenes about me, and I thought, 'Until now, I have wasted my youth in vain things, minding sheep and abstaining from the pleasures of life.' And Satan again murmured to me, 'Leave your sheep, go to the city, and there enjoy life.' I was ready to follow the advice of Satan, when I beheld, underneath the gay scenes, a very deep grave full of human skeletons that were worm-eaten and rotted with age. I trembled at the sight of it, and I rebuked myself, saying: 'O, wicked one, who goes astray after the lure of your eyes! Why should you pride yourself when you live in a world that does not belong to you? Why do you forget the end in store for you, which is nothing but dust and worms? I swear that I will destroy your beauty, so that you shall no longer pride yourself on it.' I then left my sheep with a friend, and I have come from the south to you that I may fulfill my vow."

Simon the Just was deeply moved by the simple story told by the lad. He kissed the youth on the head and he said: "May such Nazarites as you increase in Israel."

2. *The Death of Simon the Just*

Simon the Just ministered as high priest for forty years. Many miracles happened during his days. Once the king of Greece ordered that images be set up in the Temple, and the people fasted and prayed to God that the decree of the king come to nought.

While in the Temple, Simon the Just heard a voice announcing: "The king of Greece will be murdered and his decree nullified." Simon told the people of what he had heard in the Temple, and so indeed it turned out.

A representative of the king of Greece came to Jerusalem to see to it that his decree was carried out. The Jews pleaded with him not to execute the order of the king. Simon the Just then said to the people, "Why plead with a mortal who is unable to do you harm? Pray to the Almighty God, who is able to give you relief." At that moment a courier came from Greece, bringing with him a message which read: "The king of Greece has been assassinated, and his decree is null and void."

Once when Simon the Just came out from the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he

looked very sad. The people who had always been accustomed to see his face expressing joy and mirth, asked in great bewilderment: "What, O lord, is the cause of your grief this day?"

"This year," said Simon the Just, "I am going to die."

"Where did you receive such tidings?" asked the people.

"During the forty years that I have been officiating at the Temple," said Simon, "I have been accustomed to see on every Day of Atonement, an old man dressed in white, who had the appearance of an angel, and who used to follow me when I went into the Holy of Holies, and to leave with me when I was through with my service there. This time, the same man appeared but he was dressed in black robes; he accompanied me into the Holy of Holies, but did not leave when I left."

And so it was. In that year, after the Festival of Tabernacles, Simon the Just gave up his ghost. The Israelites throughout the land mourned their great loss for many days.

3. *Rabbi Jose ben Joezer*

After the death of Simon the Just, there were many people who adopted the ways and the customs of the Greeks. R. Jose ben Joezer, who used to preach to these people and warn them of the bitter end in store for them, was very much hated

by the followers of the Greeks. One day they succeeded in trumping up a charge against Rabbi Jose, and he was sentenced to die for a crime of which he was innocent.

On a Sabbath day, Rabbi Jose ben Joezer was taken from prison, and led to the gallows, upon which he was to be hanged. While he was being led through the streets by the executioner, followed by a very great multitude of people, he noticed his nephew Jakim of Seroroth, riding on a powerful steed. The rabbi was greeted by his nephew with sarcastic remarks: "O my saintly uncle! Look at the nice beautiful horse which God has given me to ride on, and notice the wonderful gallows which your good God has allotted you this day to ride (hang) on. I have not denied myself any pleasures, and have followed the desire of my eyes, yet I have succeeded in life; you have refused to enjoy the pleasures of this world, and you have done the will of God, and now God is rewarding you with a tree for a gallows and a rope to hang down from."

"If they who provoke His anger fare thus," replied R. Jose, "how much worse will those fare who do His will!"

"Why, have you ever provoked the anger of God?" asked Jakim in great surprise. "To be sure, there is none in Israel who is as God-fearing as you are."

"Then if they who do His will fare thus," stated the rabbi again, "how much worse will it be with those who provoke His anger."

The words calmly uttered by the rabbi pierced the very heart of Jakim of Seroroth, as if he had been stung by a poisonous serpent. And, while the rabbi was being led to the gallows, Jakim went home and prepared a gallows for himself. Underneath the gallows he arranged a pile of wood surrounded by a loose stone fence, and in the middle of the woodpile he fixed a very sharp sword with its point upward. He then set the wood on fire, and he hanged himself on the gallows he had prepared. When the flame of the burning wood rose, the rope broke, Jakim's dead body was transfixed by the sword and burnt by the fire, after which the stones of the fence caved in and crushed whatever was left of the body. Thus did Jakim do penitence by suffering every manner of death prescribed in the Law of God.

While Rabbi Jose ben Joezer was waiting to be hanged, he fell into a light slumber. His disciples noticed that a smile came over the face of their doomed rabbi, and they wondered what the cause of it might be. When the rabbi awoke, he said to them: "I saw my soul flying up to heaven and reaching the gates of Paradise. There I saw a pure soul waiting at the gates to be admitted. You see, my nephew, Jakim of Seroroth, has preceded me to the gates of heaven by an instant."

4. *Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum*

In those days there lived in Jerusalem a very rich man whose name was Harsum. He owned a thousand towns and one thousand ships, which plied the oceans carrying merchandise of all kinds from all lands. In addition to his great wealth, he enjoyed great honor, for he was the high priest. Yet he was meek and humble, and helped the poor and the needy.

When Harsum died, his son Elazar took possession of his father's riches. Rabbi Elazar was a very learned man, and he cared very little for his wealth. In fact, when his time was all taken up by merchants who came to him from all corners of the earth to buy and to sell merchandise, he was very much grieved.

One day Rabbi Elazar thought: "All of my time is taken up with my business, and there is no time left for the study of the Torah. The best thing for me to do is to leave Jerusalem, and go to a place where I am not known, so that I can study the Torah undisturbed."

Entrusting the management of his wealth to some friends in whom he had confidence, Rabbi Elazar disguised himself as a beggar, and settled in one of his own towns to study the Torah uninterrupted.

One day, some of Rabbi Elazar's own servants caught sight of this beggar who never seemed to

work, and they said to him: "You are enjoying the hospitality of Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum and you eat of his bread. Now you cannot walk about idly, you must help us serve him." They forced him to dig wells and repair roads. The stranger protested and begged them to leave him alone, but they replied: "We swear by the life of our master, Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum, that we will not leave you go, until you have finished the work."

Handing some gold coins to the men, the disguised rabbi said: "Here, take this money, and let me go free."

The men took the money, and said: "Go in peace; and now thank our master Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum, who in his wisdom and goodness employs men whose hearts are softened by words of supplication."

R. Elazar hurriedly left the town, and never again did he see it during his lifetime.

5. *The Translation of the Seventy*

Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, was told that the Five Books of Moses contained many wise and useful laws, and he was anxious to have these books translated into Greek, so that he, too, might learn their contents.

Accordingly he ordered his artisans to make a table of gold, two gold vases, two silver ones, and two golden cups, and all of these were studded with five thousand pearls of all sizes. He gave

these presents, together with a sealed letter addressed to Elazar the high priest, into the hands of one of his trustworthy generals, and ordered him to go to Jerusalem and deliver the letter and the gifts to Elazar.

The Egyptian general arrived in Jerusalem, and delivered to Elazar the presents and the letter, which read: "From Ptolemy, king of Egypt, to Elazar, the high priest, in Jerusalem, greetings. Whereas I am told that the Five Books of Moses contain many wise and useful laws, I am anxious to have them translated into the Greek language. Now I request of you this favor: Choose seventy-two elders who are well versed in the Law and are well acquainted with the Greek language and send them to my palace in Egypt to translate the Law of Moses for me."

Elazar the high priest was elated over the letter, and he said to the representative of the Egyptian king: "Please give me a few days' time, so that I may select the right men to do the work." Elazar then chose seventy-two of the sages of Jerusalem, presented them to the Egyptian general, and said to him: "Pray treat these men with respect, and grant them whatever they may request of you. Make request of your king in my name, that he should not retain these men even one day after they have completed their work of translating the Law of Moses."

In Egypt the seventy-two men were received

with royal honors by Ptolemy. Upon the request of the king that they show him the book of the Law they had brought with them, they produced a scroll of parchment on which were written golden letters. The king thanked the seventy-two sages for coming to Egypt at his request, and then sailed with them to an island far away from the Egyptian capital.

On the island each and every sage was locked in a separate house, so that one might not consult with the other concerning the translation, and the king said to each one of them: "Now translate the Book of God for me. All your needs will be supplied while you are on the island." As he left them, the king thought: "If their translations will not differ from one another, then I will be convinced that they have made a true rendering of the Holy Book."

The sages commenced their work immediately, each and every one for himself. God imparted to them special wisdom for the great task, and each and every one of them wrote the translation in the same style and after the same fashion.

At the end of seventy-two days, Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, visited the sages on the island, and inquired of each and every one of them: "How far have you proceeded with your work?"

"I have just completed the translation to-day," each and every one of them replied.

The king then took the elders back to his capital city, and there showered royal gifts on them, and with great pomp and circumstance sent the translators of the Law of God back to their land.

CHAPTER III

THE OPPRESSIONS OF THE JEWS BY THE GREEKS

1. *Heliodorus*



IN the days when the Greeks began to oppress the Jews, there was a traitor who informed King Seleucus II, that in the Temple at Jerusalem there were stored many treasures. The king, who was then in great need of money, called for his trustworthy general Heliodorus, and ordered him to go to Jerusalem and confiscate for the crown all the wealth stored in the Temple.

Arriving in Jerusalem with some of his picked troops, Heliodorus went to the high priest Onias, and said: "Our mighty king, Seleucus II, has been informed that in your temple are stored many valuable treasures, and he has ordered me to confiscate all I find there for the crown."

"The king has been misinformed," said the troubled Onias. "All that the Temple contains at present is charity money to help the orphans and the widows. Pray do not desecrate our holy Temple."

"I cannot disobey the command of my king," answered the determined Heliodorus. "The will of the king must be done."

In spite of the supplications of the high priest, Heliodorus forced his way into the Temple. But in the Temple the invader beheld an old man riding a powerful steed, and two beautiful little boys who held whips in their hands. The horse kicked Heliodorus and knocked him to the ground. Then the old man on the steed said to the two lads: "Strike the enemy without pity." The youths beat Heliodorus into unconsciousness with their whips, and the priests had to drag him out of the Temple.

A deep sleep then overcame Heliodorus, and he dreamt that the two beautiful youths by whom he had been beaten said to him: "Onias the Just has prayed to God for thy sake, and God has hearkened to his prayer. Now rise and pay him your respects."

Heliodorus awoke from his sleep with a start, but he was very happy to discover that he was still alive. He took leave of the high priest, after presenting him with many gifts of gold and precious stones.

King Seleucus II was furious when Heliodorus returned from the Jerusalem empty-handed. "Tell me, then, whom shall I now send to confiscate the treasures for me?" asked the disappointed king.

"O sire," said Heliodorus, "if you have an enemy in your land of whom you would like to

get rid, entrust him with the mission, for he will surely receive his just deserts."

2. *Elazar the Martyr*

When Antiochus ascended the throne, he sent expeditions into Jerusalem that robbed the Temple and carried off many of the inhabitants into captivity. This king issued an order: "We have but one language and one law. Any one who is caught fulfilling any of the laws of Moses will be put to death by horrible torture."

Among the many captives taken from Jerusalem, there was a venerable old man, Elazar by name. King Antiochus was anxious that all the captives worship the idols that he had erected, and he therefore sent one of his officers to speak kindly to Elazar and to persuade him to be the first one to bow to the idols. "For," thought the king, "if this old man, who has so much influence over his people will worship the idol, all the captives will follow his example."

The king's officers approached Elazar and said to him: "It is the will of the king that you worship the idols. If you will do the king's bidding the king will make you very rich and powerful."

"Silver and gold are naught," answered the venerable Elazar; "I will remain faithful to my God to the day of my death."

Knowing that the old man would have to suffer torture and death for his refusal to obey the wish

of the king, the officer took pity on him, and he said: "I have compassion on you, for I know that you will die a horrible death, therefore I will do this for you: I will give you meat to eat which is not forbidden by your Law. You will eat this meat before the idol, and the people, thinking that you are eating of the forbidden meat which was sacrificed to the idol, will follow your example."

"What! you wish me to deceive my brethren, and cause them to worship the despicable idols?" said Elazar indignantly. "It shall not be. I will not deceive my people, even if I have to die a thousand horrible deaths."

The officers pitied the old man, for their hearts were moved by his heroic answers. But the tyrannical king had no pity, and he ordered that Elazar be tortured in the public place until he died, so that all the other captives might be terrified into submission.

The sight of Elazar's tortures and death had just the opposite effect than the one the king expected. All the captives, as one man, now decided not to yield to the tyrant Antiochus, but to give up their lives for the sake of their faith.

3. *Hannah and Her Seven Sons*

Among the captives was a courageous woman named Hannah with her seven sons. They were brought before King Antiochus, who said to the eldest: "Bow to my image that you may live."

The eldest son said coolly: "The Lord our God commands us in His Torah, 'Thou shalt not have other gods; thou shalt not bow to them, neither shalt thou serve them.' How can I disobey His will?"

"But if you dare disobey me," said the king, "you shall suffer death."

"I am ready to die for the sake of my God," answered the youth.

The king became furious and turning to his officers, he said: "Bring here hot coals and pans; cut off his hands and cut out his tongue, and roast them on the fire pan in the presence of his mother and his brothers. Let them see the horrible death of this youngster, and learn to obey my command."

After the eldest son was put to death by these terrible tortures, the king turned to the second son, and he said to him: "Bow to the idols, so that you may spare yourself a horrible death."

"Bring on your fire and sword," said the second son, "and act with me as you see fit."

"Cut off his ears, nose, the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet," exclaimed the ferocious king; "put his body on the hot coals, and let him die."

"Oh, you tyrant!" exclaimed the second son. "You can destroy our bodies, but you cannot destroy our souls. Our souls shall be taken up to heaven by the One who created them, and there they shall enjoy everlasting life; but your spirit

shall descend to the infernal regions, and your memory shall be a curse and a disgrace for ever and ever."

The second son was put to death as the king had commanded, and the king turned to the third one, and said: "You have seen what I have done to your older brothers. Now obey me and I will spare your life."

"You may double the tortures and take my life," said the third son, "but I will not disobey my Father in heaven."

Antiochus, noticing the courageous behavior of the lad and fearing that he might be insulted before his own officers, ordered that the head of the youth be removed at once. Thus did the third son meet with his death.

"Just make one bow to the idols," said the king to the fourth son, "and you will escape death."

"I will worship God, the Lord of the heavens and of the earth," said the fourth son; "and to Him alone will I bow." Thereupon the fourth son was also put to death by the order of the king.

When the fifth son was brought before the merciless king, the youth said: "O heartless king! You think that by killing us you will acquire for yourself a great name, and that you will go down in history as a great hero. Your name and memory will be cursed in all generations to come, for they will say, 'Surely there has never arisen a more tyrannical king than Antiochus.'"

Incensed at the words of the youth, the king exclaimed: "Remove him quickly from my sight." And thus did the fifth son meet with death for his loyalty to the Law of God.

Thereupon the sixth son was brought before the king, and the youth said: "O king, listen to my words. We have sinned against our merciful Father in heaven, and He has delivered us into your hands. But you have tortured us more than was the desire of our good God. Know you therefore that you will suffer for your cruelty, and that you will endure terrible tortures for your heartlessness."

The king ordered that this youth, too, be removed quickly from his sight, and thus the sixth son perished.

At last the youngest son was brought before the king. The king took pity on the tender youth and, turning to the mother who had looked on without complaint when her six sons were put to death, he said: "Six of your sons have already given up their lives, wherefore shall this one, too, die? Persuade him to obey my command, and I will make him the happiest man in my kingdom. And your life, too, O woman, will be saved."

The most unfortunate mother embraced her son, kissed him and said: "My youthful son! Pay no heed to this tyrant who has killed your six brothers. Rely not upon his word, for he himself knows not what may happen to him the next day.

By listening to this king you will lose everlasting life. Die for the sake of our God, as your six brothers have died, and our God in heaven will give you everlasting life in the world to come."

The king, abashed at being unable to persuade even a small boy to do his wish, said to the seventh son: "Here, I will drop my ring near you, and you will stoop to raise it from the ground. The people will then believe that you have bowed to the idol, and you will save me from disgrace. By doing this you will commit no crime, and your life will be saved."

"O you heartless king," said the youthful boy, "you think God will allow your cruel acts to pass by unnoticed? Behold, a day will come when you shall be punished manifold for your cruelty. You will die the death of a wretch."

"Remove him from my sight," shouted the very much disappointed king. "Let him suffer worse tortures than any of his brothers had received. Show no mercy."

Hannah, the unhappy mother, stood by the mutilated dead bodies of her seven sons, who had died for the sake of the Law of God, and she prayed thus: "O Lord God! Take my soul, so that I fall not into the hands of these tyrants." Hardly had she finished her prayer when her soul flew up to heaven.

CHAPTER IV

THE REVOLT OF THE MACCABEES

1. *The Death of Antiochus*



HE aged high priest, Mattathias, raised the flag of revolt against the Greeks, and in many skirmishes defeated the enemy. The high priest died two years after he had started the uprising, and his son Judas the Maccabee became the leader of the Jews.

Antiochus decided to crush the rebellion, and to destroy all the Jews. He gathered a very large army, and he himself went at the head of his warriors. On the way to Judea, the wicked king was stricken with leprosy. The king was racked with pain, but he would not give up his intention to destroy the whole land of Judea.

"O sire," said the king's officers and councillors, "return to your land, and when you have been cured from your sickness, you will muster an army again and march against the rebels."

The king was enraged at these words, and angrily retorted: "I have no cause to fear anything. I possess both the oceans and the land, and

who is able to prevent me from doing what I desire to do? Proceed by forced marches to Jerusalem, and exterminate the rebels."

The king had hardly finished his arrogant speech, when his chariot happened to pass by one of the elephants which were used in the war. The elephant suddenly became frightened and uttered a loud roar. The horses of the king's chariot were startled by the trumpeting of the elephant, and upset the chariot on top of the sore body of the king. The fall fractured some of the king's bones, and he could no longer remain seated in the chariot. His bodyguards had to carry the king on their shoulders. But the king's crushed leprous body gave forth a terrible stench, and the bodyguards, unable to endure the awful odor, deposited the body of the king on the ground and ran away.

The king, writhing in terrible pain and agony, said: "If the God of Israel will heal me from this illness, I will visit His city, Jerusalem, and fill it with silver and gold. I will open all my treasures and consecrate them to the Temple of God. I will go among all the nations of the world and exclaim, 'There is none like the God of Israel.'"

But his prayers remained unanswered. His bones and flesh rotted on him while he was still alive. Thus did the wicked Antiochus die a horrible death in a strange land.

2. *The Miracles*

The brave Judas Maccabee fought many battles against the Greeks, and every time defeated them. When the victorious general thought that he would not be bothered by the invading Greeks for some time, he went with his army to Jerusalem to clean the Temple. He destroyed all the altars built there by the officers of Antiochus, demolished all the idols, and built a new altar. The Jews then proceeded to offer sacrifices upon the newly-built altar, but the holy flame which had perpetually burned upon the altar had become extinguished, and strange fire from the outside could not be brought in, for God had forbidden this in His Torah.

Judas with his victorious warriors fervently prayed to God, and a great miracle occurred. Out of the stones with which the altar had been erected, came forth a fire, and the assembled people fell on their faces and praised the Almighty for His mercy.

The priests then went to kindle the candelabra which was to burn in the Temple continually. In the candelabra they were permitted to use only special oil prepared for the purpose. Bottles of this specially prepared oil were always sealed with the seal of the high priest. The priests searched high and low for the oil, but none could be found anywhere.

Finally there was found a bottle of oil sealed with the seal of the high priest, but the oil in it was sufficient to supply the candelabra for only one day and one night. But to the joy of the victorious worshipers, another miracle occurred now. The little oil poured into the holy candle-stick lasted fully eight days and nights. The assembly broke out in loud praise, and said: "Praise ye the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever."

3. *The Wars Against Lysias*

After the death of Antiochus, Eupator, then still an infant, ascended the throne. Lysias, the commander-in-chief of the Grecian armies, went forth to crush the rebellion of the Maccabees. Judas, the fearless general, when he beheld the vast army, simply raised his eyes toward heaven and prayed. As soon as he lowered his eyes, he beheld five youths, riding fiery horses. Three of them went forth and slew many of the enemy, while the other two removed their golden shields and put them on Judas to protect him from the swords of the Greeks.

Judas, the fighting lion, encouraged by this sight, urged his men on to victory over the Greeks. Lysias made peace with Judas, and returned to his country.

Among the warriors in the army of Lysias, there was one officer named Nicanor, who had said on approaching the gates of Jerusalem: "I raise my

hand in solemn oath that I will raze this city and its Temple to the ground." Due to the heroic acts of the fighting men of Judea, Nicanor was taken captive. As the fingers of his hands were cut off and hung upon the gates of Jerusalem, the Judeans exclaimed: "Let the hands raised in defiance of God and His Temple become the food of the birds of heaven!" These gates were then known as "The Gates of Nicanor."

The peace made by Lysias with Judas was not of long duration, for Lysias upon reaching his country was induced by the officers of the youthful king Eupator to raise a mighty army, including many trained fighting elephants, and to renew the war against Judas. This time the youthful king, too, was taken to the battle-field.

The lion-hearted Judas was informed of the intention of Lysias, but he was not discouraged. He urged on his men to fight to the bitter end for the freedom of their country, and they won one victory after another.

During one of the battles Elazar, the brother of Judas, noticed a man with a golden shield riding a beautifully bedecked elephant. Thinking that this was the youthful King Eupator, Elazar broke through the lines of the enemy single-handed, crept underneath the elephant and stabbed it to death. The dying elephant fell on the brave Elazar and crushed him to death.

Shortly afterwards a messenger came and

informed Lysias that Philip, a friend of the late Antiochus, had rebelled against Eupator. The king and his commander-in-chief made peace with Judas, and swore never to wage war against Judea again.

CHAPTER V

JUDITH

1. *The Siege of Bethulia*



IN those days, Bethulia, one of the cities in the Judean domain, was surrounded by a hostile Assyrian army under the command of Captain Holofernes. The Assyrian army blockaded the city and cut off its water supply.

After some time, the water in the city gave out, and men, women, and children began to die of thirst. The people then approached Uzziah, the mayor of Bethulia, and, in the presence of the elders, complained: "Our women and children are dying of thirst, and there is no hope left for us. Let us surrender! Let us open the gates to our merciless enemy. We would rather perish by the sword than behold the fearful agony of our dying women and children."

"Brethren, let us not surrender so hastily," pleaded Uzziah. "Let us wait five more days; perhaps the Almighty God will bring salvation to us from some source. I intended to send messengers to our brethren in the other cities, and ask

them to come to our aid and drive the enemy away. But, alas, the enemy has discovered all our secret passages and blockaded them. Be men, O you people of Bethulia. Let us be patient for five more days. Then, if no help comes within that time, we shall surrender to our enemy. Now go home and pray to God, for He hearkens to those who confide in Him."

Among the inhabitants of Bethulia there was a widow named Judith. She was very pious, extremely rich and exceedingly charming. When she heard the reply that Uzziah gave to the inhabitants of the city, she said to the mayor and the elders: "Do not provoke the anger of our merciful Father by setting a time for Him to bring salvation to our people. Let us not tempt the Almighty. He can save us whenever He sees fit. It is our duty to pray for His help, and remain steadfast in our faith."

"But," insisted Uzziah, "the people are suffering horrible tortures; and if no rain comes down from heaven in the near future, we shall all die of thirst. The oath I have given to my people must remain in force. If no salvation comes before the end of five days, we will surrender. Now it is up to you, pious Judith, to pray with us for rain."

"This evening, when darkness envelops the city," said Judith, "you shall open the gate for my maid-servant and myself. With the help of God, I shall bring salvation to all of you. Pray do not

ask me for further details, for I will give you none before our Lord God has delivered Holofernes into my hands."

The people looked at one another in great astonishment and exclaimed: "May our merciful God be with you, O pious woman, so that you may bring salvation to our suffering people."

2. *Judith in the Assyrian Camp*

Toward evening, Judith prayed fervently to God that He be with her and guard her on the way. Then she donned her best apparel and prepared to leave the city. At the gate of the city, she was met by Uzziah and all the elders, who opened the gate for her, at her request, and said: "May the Lord give you grace in the eyes of those in whose presence you come; and may your heroic deed bring salvation and glory to our people."

Judith and her maid vanished into the dark of night. Somewhere beyond the mountains, they were accosted by a sentinel of the Assyrian army: "Halt there! who is coming?"

"I am one of the inhabitants of the besieged city of Bethulia," said the beautiful Judith. "Bring me before your commander-in-chief, for I have a very important message to deliver to him."

Holofernes was immediately informed of the presence of Judith, and he ordered that she be brought before him at once. Judith bowed humbly

when she was led before the general of the Assyrian army, who said to her: "Where do you come from, fair woman, and what may your wish be?"

"I have escaped from the besieged city," replied Judith. "There is no more water left within the walls of the city, and soon the food too will give out. I am convinced that in the near future the inhabitants will be forced to violate the laws of their God, and partake of the food they are forbidden to eat. Once they disobey their God and eat of the forbidden food, they will lose favor in the sight of their God, and you will be able to conquer the city without the loss of a single man. I have therefore left my people to inform you of a matter of great importance."

"And what is it?" inquired the impatient general.

"O mighty commander," said Judith, "well do you know that their God is their protector, and therefore no evil can befall them. But this is so only when they are obedient to His laws. Once they have angered Him by disobedience, they become powerless. I saw that they were on the point of committing a grave crime against their God by eating forbidden food. For this reason, I have left the city in order to inform you of the auspicious moment when you and your men will be able to capture the city and all its inhabitants without the loss of a single man."

"Very well," exclaimed the elated general. "But how will you know when they commit that crime, while you are with us?"

"Some of the men who are watching at the gate, are my friends," said Judith. "From them I can learn anything I want. Now pray give an order to your men that they permit me and my maid to leave camp every evening, so that I can come before the gates of the city and obtain all the necessary information from the gate-keepers."

The Assyrian general, very much smitten with the beauty of Judith and her convincing manner of speech, ordered that the voluntary captives be permitted to leave camp every evening without hindrance. Accordingly, Judith and her maid left camp when it grew dark, and approaching the gates of the besieged city, fervently prayed to God that He be with her in time of need.

3. *The Heroic Deed*

Three days passed, and on the fourth day, Holofernes made a banquet for his officers, and he ordered that Judith and her maid be invited. The widow gladly accepted the invitation of the Assyrian general, and together with her maid she came to the tent of Holofernes where all officers were making merry and drinking wine.

Seated at the table, Judith said: "Mighty conqueror, before tasting any of your wine and food, I would very much like you to taste some of the

wine and food which I had brought with me from my city."

"Very well," said the general, and thus saying he began eating the food and drinking the wine which Judith had taken out of her bag.

"The food is delicious, and the wine is very strong and old," said the general; "pray, fairest of all women, give me some more of it."

The Assyrian general drank many a goblet of the wine, until he became exceedingly drunk, and fell fast asleep. The guests soon left, but Judith and her maid lingered in the tent. She closed the door of the tent, and, taking the general's sword which was hanging on the wall above his head, she prayed: "O Almighty God, deliver Thy people from the hands of this cruel oppressor." She let the sword fall with great strength, and the head of Holofernes was severed from his body. With trembling hands she placed the head into her bag, left the tent, locking the door behind her. Judith and her maid left camp as usual without being molested by anybody.

Arriving at the gates of the city, Judith called out to the watchman: "Pray open the gates quickly, for your salvation is nigh." The watchmen immediately called for Uzziah and the elders, who opened the gates for Judith, and anxiously inquired: "What news bring you with you, O pious woman?"

"Good tidings, good tidings!" exclaimed the

heroine. "Our salvation is at hand. Thank the Almighty God for His mercy." Thus saying, she pulled out the head of Holofernes, and said: "This is the head of the cruel Assyrian general. When he was fast asleep in his drunken state, I cut off his head."

"What shall be done now?" asked the astonished Uzziah and the elders.

"My advice is," said the heroine, "that you hang up the head of Holofernes on the city wall, facing the enemy's camp. In the morning, issue a command for fighting men to assemble, gird on their weapons, and leave the city. Let them walk to the top of the mountains in view of the enemy. The Assyrians will then get their army together for war, and call upon their commander-in-chief for his orders. When they find him beheaded, they will run in confusion and abandon their camp: Then you will descend from the mountains, run after them and subdue them."

"O pious woman," exclaimed Uzziah and the elders, "you are as brave and as wise as an angel of God. May your name remain a blessing for all generations to come."

Uzziah and the elders of Bethulia at once ordered that all fighting men be ready with their weapons for the morning, and the head of Holofernes they hung up high on the city wall where it could be seen from the camp of the Assyrians.

In the morning, Uzziah led his men out of the



"This is the head of the cruel Assyrian general"

gates of the city to the top of the mountains. The Assyrian sentinels espied their foes on the mountains, and sent an alarm throughout the camp: "To arms, to arms, for the Hebrews have come out of the besieged city to meet us in battle!"

Thereupon all the Assyrian soldiers assembled, ready to fight, and waited for their general to come out of his tent to give the order. To the amazement of all the captains, their general failed to appear, and they dispatched a messenger to call him. Upon reaching the tent of Holofernes, the messenger said to the sentinel at the door: "Lo, the Hebrews have come out of their city to wage war against us, and our commander-in-chief is still asleep in his tent. It is the request of his staff that you wake him up, for they do not know what to do."

The sentinel and the messenger then forced the door open, and to their great amazement they found their beloved general lying beheaded on his bed. They uttered a piercing cry of terror, and captains and soldiers alike came running breathlessly to see what had occurred. "Our general has been beheaded," cried the people. "There on the walls of the city hangs his head!" So saying they pointed to the spot in terror, and commenced to flee in every direction, abandoning their camp and everything it contained.

Uzziah and his men watched what was going on in the Assyrian camp, and he ordered his men to

follow him. They pursued the fleeing enemy, and slew many thousands of them. Returning from their pursuit, Uzziah and his men visited the abandoned camp where they found great booty and weapons of war. After gathering up the booty, they returned to their city and thanked God for His mercy.

Thus was the city of Bethulia saved from the hands of Holofernes by the heroic deed of Judith, whose name remained a blessing for all time.

CHAPTER VI

RABBI SIMEON BEN SHETAH

1. *The Precious Stone*



IN those days, there lived in Jerusalem a great rabbi named Simeon ben Shetah. He was a very learned and pious man. Day and night he was occupied with the study of the Torah, and students flocked to him from all over the land. This sage refused to accept fees from his pupils, and supported himself and his family by making ink out of gallnuts. Every day this great rabbi would go to the forest to pick gallnuts, out of which he would make ink to sell to the people of his town.

"Walking on foot to and from the forest takes too much time," thought Simeon ben Shetah. "Because of this, I am unable to devote the whole of my time to study." He decided finally to sell everything he had in the house. With the money he realized from the sale he purchased an ass from an Arab in the market place.

Simeon's disciples were very happy at the sight of the ass, and they said to one another: "Now our great teacher will no longer have to carry the gall-

nuts on his back all the way from the forests." They went out to examine the ass, and to their great amazement and delight they discovered a precious stone hanging from the neck of the animal.

"Oh, master!" they all shouted out as one upon entering the house, "may the name of our Lord be blessed forever and ever, for you shall no longer know of poverty and want."

"Why, what has happened?" asked the astonished rabbi.

"It was the will of our good Lord that you become rich," answered the disciples. "Behold, here is a precious stone which we discovered hanging from the neck of the ass you have bought."

"God forbid that I derive any benefit from this stone," said the teacher, taking the gem into his hand. "For I have bought an ass from the Arab, and not a precious stone. I must go and forthwith ascertain the whereabouts of the Arab and return this stone to him."

Rabbi Simeon at once went back to the marketplace, found the Arab from whom he had bought the ass, and said to him: "Here, my good man, is a precious stone which I found hanging from the neck of your ass; it does not belong to me; it is yours."

The Arab looked in great bewilderment first at the stone and then at the rabbi, and exclaimed: "Praised be the God of Simeon ben Shetah."

2. *Simeon ben Shetah in a Cave*

Alexander Jannaeus, king of Judea, heard of the greatness of Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, and therefore requested him to be a frequent visitor to his palace. The king was very much impressed with the wisdom and honesty of Simeon. Later on the king married Salome, known thereafter as Queen Alexandra, sister of the great rabbi.

King Alexander made a great celebration to commemorate his victories over the small neighboring kingdoms, and he invited all the sages of Israel to the palace. A certain man, Elazar ben Poira, became envious of the distinction shown by the king to Simeon ben Shetah and the wise men of Judea. Turning to the king, he said: "Do you really believe that these men honor and respect you, O sire? I am convinced that, while they utter praises of your greatness with their lips, in their hearts they hate and despise you."

"How can you prove to me that you speak the truth?" asked the king.

"O sire," said the cunning Elazar, "merely proclaim yourself the high priest of Judea, then they will rise against you to a man, and disclose their hatred toward you."

During the feast, King Alexander placed on his forehead the golden plate that was to be worn by the high priest, and proclaimed himself the high priest of Judea. One of the sages, Judah ben

G'dida, rose to his feet and said: "O sire, let the crown suffice you; wherefore do you also take the high-priesthood?"

"Am I not a descendant of the high priest Matathias?" asked the king. "Why, then, am I not entitled to the high-priesthood?"

"Before your birth," fearlessly answered Judah, "your mother was a captive among the heathens; and therefore the children born by her thereafter are ineligible to the priesthood."

"I shall make investigation," stated the insulted king, "and if your statement is found to be true, I will renounce the priesthood."

An investigation was at once commenced by the king, and the allegation made by Judah ben G'dida could not be verified. Then said Elazar to the king: "This proves my statement that these men hate you and detest you, O sire."

The enraged king thereupon issued an order that all the sages of Israel be killed. Many sages fled from the land of Judea, and many of them were slain by the sword, but Simeon was saved by his sister, Queen Alexandra, who found shelter for him in a secret hiding place.

3. *The Promotion of Simeon ben Shetah*

Sometime afterwards, certain Parthian envoys came to the court of Alexander Jannaeus, and were invited to the king's table. During the meal, the Parthian envoys remarked: "O sire, on our

previous visit, one of your sages was present at court, and we profited by his great wisdom. Where is he now? We would be greatly pleased to hear him again."

Alexander told the Parthian envoys what had happened to the sages, and the envoys expressed great regret at the unfortunate occurrence. Queen Alexandra noticed the expression of grief on the countenance of the king, and, taking advantage of this opportunity, she said: "O king, if you will give me your assurance that no harm will befall him, I shall produce Simeon before you this instant."

The king thereupon answered with great delight: "Yes, I give my solemn promise that no harm will befall the fugitive, only let him appear to please my guests."

Queen Alexandra at once sent word that her brother be brought to the palace immediately, and when he appeared before the king and his guests, he was given a very warm reception. The king invited him to take his seat between the queen and the king, and remarked: "See what great honor I bestow upon you."

"O sire," said Simeon, "it is not you who bestows honor upon me, but the Torah; the wisdom I serve grants me equal rank with kings."

Thereupon the Parthian envoys expressed their wish that the rabbi address them on some topic or other. Simeon ben Shetah agreed, and so deep

was the impression he made upon them, that when they were about to leave, they said: "Of all the great things we saw and heard in the wonderful city of Jerusalem, nothing made such a deep impression on our minds as the wise words of the great teacher, Simeon ben Shetah."

After that, King Alexander appointed Simeon the president of the college.

3. *The Execution of Eighty Witches*

At that time, there lived a certain man named Baya, a tax collector who was despised by the people because of his wickedness. It so happened that, on the day he died, one of the sages of the city likewise died, and both of them were carried in hearses to be buried. Baya was accompanied only by his own family, while the sage was followed by a great multitude of men, who mourned and wept for him.

As the two processions marched along, the people were suddenly surprised by the war-cries of a troop of soldiers who happened to pass by, and who threatened to kill everybody in their way. The family of Baya and the great multitude that attended the funeral of the sage abandoned the hearses in the middle of the street, and ran for safety. As it happened, the hearses were placed one next to the other, and when the panic subsided and the people returned to care for their dead, the great multitude, by mistake, took Baya's hearse,

thinking that it was that of the sage, and carried it to the sepulchre with great honor.

"You are all gravely mistaken!" exclaimed a young man who stepped out of the great multitude. "I am a disciple of this sage and one of his ardent admirers. During the commotion, I did not move from the spot. I remained all the while within sight of my teacher's hearse, because of my great reverence for him, and I am certain that you have taken up the wrong hearse. The one you are carrying is that of the hated tax-collector. The wicked is being given great honors, while the righteous is being buried with contempt and disgrace."

In spite of this positive statement, the multitude paid no heed to the young scholar, and carried the hearse of Baya with honor to the sepulchre. The sage, accompanied by the family of Baya, was buried unnoticed and with great disrespect.

Grieved at this insult to his beloved teacher, the young man wept all day and tasted no food. That night, the sage appeared to his disciple in a dream, and said to him: "My faithful disciple, be not grieved over the insult that I received at the hands of the multitude. I have deserved this punishment, for I was sinful before God."

"Is it possible that you have sinned, O great sage?" asked the young disciple in his dream.

"One day I was present when a learned man was insulted by wicked people," said the sage.

"These wicked people were powerful men, and because I feared them, I failed to take the part of the sage. I permitted an insult to a sage to go by unnoticed, and now this insult has been meted out to me from Heaven."

"But why did the hated Baya deserve to be buried with such honors?" asked the curious disciple.

The dead sage replied: "One day this man Baya made a great banquet and invited all the officers and honorable men of the city to be his guests, but they would not condescend to come to his house. Baya then distributed the food prepared for his guests among the poor of the city. For this reason he has deserved an honorable burial."

Another night the disciple had the following dream: His teacher was walking in a most beautiful orchard planted beside a sparkling brook of water. Baya, the tax-collector, was also there. Baya became thirsty and went down to the brook to quench his thirst. He knelt beside the water and was about to drink, but the water recoiled. Again he reached for the water, but once more the water recoiled. He tried again and again to quench his fearful thirst, but always in vain.

"Wherefore is he thus punished?" the disciple asked of his teacher.

"Because he would not give bread to the hungry, and water to the thirsty," replied the teacher.

The disciple then saw a very pitiful sight: A

young woman was lying on the ground, and the pin upon which the gates of Hell rest, revolved in her ear. "Why is this woman punished so frightfully?" inquired the disciple with a shudder.

"At her father's home, she had the opportunity to learn what is good, but she rejected the good she had heard with her ears, and accepted only the evil," replied the sage. "This horrible punishment will thus continue until the death of Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, when he will take her place," continued the teacher.

"What!" exclaimed the young disciple. "Shall Simeon, the most pious of his generation, be thus punished? Of what crime is he guilty?"

The dead sage replied: "In Ashkelon there live eighty witches. With their enchantments they mislead many people, and Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah is aware of their existence, but he takes no pains to remove this evil from the midst of the people. When you arise in the morning betake yourself to the house of the rabbi, and speak thus to him: 'Before you became president of the college, you made a vow that if you were ever promoted to this high office, you would remove the witches from the face of the earth. Now you have been president of the college for some time, and yet you have failed to fulfill your vow. Last night my teacher appeared to me in a dream and told me that for your neglect, you would descend to Hell!'"

"But Rabbi Simeon will not believe me when I tell him that you appeared to me in a dream," said the surprised disciple.

"Give him this sign to convince him that you speak the truth," continued the teacher. "Place your hand on his right eye, and the eye will shoot out from its place. Then put your hand on the empty socket of his eye, and his eye will be set back in its place."

In the morning, the disciple went to the house of Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, and related to him every detail of the dream. Thereupon he was about to put his hand on the right eye of the rabbi to prove to him that he spoke the truth. But the rabbi said: "There is no need for that. I know you are speaking the truth. For I know that no living being ever knew of my vow, but myself. Since that vow has become known to you, I am convinced that it was revealed to you by Heaven. Now I will not rest until I fulfil my vow, and remove these sinful witches from the face of the earth."

One very rainy day, Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah selected eighty of the strongest young men among his disciples. He provided them with new robes which were placed in jugs that they might remain dry, and he said to the young men: "Place these pitchers on your heads and follow me to the cave of the witches. When I signal to you by whistling

once you are to take out the dry robes from the pitchers and put them on. When you hear the second whistle, you are to enter the cave at once. Each one of you will then lift up one of the witches, place her on your shoulders, and then follow me."

"But while we carry the witches, they may do us great harm by means of their strange art," argued the disciples.

"Therefore do I tell you to lift them up and place them on your shoulders," replied the rabbi. "For no witch is able to do any harm when her feet do not rest on the ground."

Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, followed by the eighty young men, reached the cave where the witches were hiding. The rabbi knocked at the door and said: "Ho, ho, open the door, for I am one of you."

"How were you able to come on a day like this without being drenched?" asked the witches.

"That was simple for me, the great magician," replied Rabbi Simeon. "I reduced myself to a very small thing, and I walked between the drops."

"What may you want with us here?" inquired the witches.

"I have come in order to learn from you, and at the same time to teach you a few things," replied Rabbi Simeon. "Let me enter, show me what you can do, and then I will show you my art."

The curious witches opened the door, and let the rabbi in. Then they proceeded to demonstrate their ability. One of the witches whispered. The ceiling of the cave opened, and a table, covered with all sorts of dainty dishes, came down and rested in the middle of the cave. Another witch whispered, and bottles of wine came down, and stood in the center of the table. Two others whispered and chirped, and on the table appeared bowls filled with all kinds of food.

"We have shown you what we are able to do with our magic art," said the witches to Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah. "It is now your turn to show us what you can do."

"You all know that it is raining very hard at present," said Rabbi Simeon; "but when I whistle twice, eighty young men will appear, all dressed in dry mantles."

"If you are able to do that," stated the witches, "then we will admit that you are the mightiest of magicians."

Thereupon Rabbi Simeon whistled once, and after a short pause, once again, and eighty young men broke in, all dressed in dry cloaks. These young men lifted the eighty witches up on their shoulders, and carried them to the gallows that had been prepared for them. The people were very thankful to the rabbi for having removed that menace from their midst, but the relatives and friends of the witches vowed vengeance.

4. *The Execution of Simeon's Son*

One day Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, while walking in a field outside the city, noticed one man running after another with the intention of killing him. Simeon ran after the two to save the victim, but he was too late, for when he arrived on the scene, he saw the victim lying on the ground in mortal agony, while the murderer stood over him with sword that was dripping with blood.

"You murderer!" cried out the infuriated rabbi. "Alas, according to our law, I cannot bring about your just punishment, as I am only one witness, and the law requires that two witnesses see the act committed. But, let the One who knows the innermost secrets of the heart, punish him who wilfully takes the life of his neighbor."

No sooner had Rabbi Simeon uttered these words, than a monstrous serpent appeared on the scene. The serpent twined itself around the murderer, bit and strangled him to death.

When the report was spread around town that two men had been found slain in the field, and that their murderer could nowhere be found, the relatives and friends of the witches said to one another: "Now we have an opportunity to take our revenge on the man who killed our friends. Let us testify that we saw the son of Rabbi Simeon kill the persons who were this day found slain in the field."

Two of them accordingly appeared before the judges and testified that the son of Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah had committed the murder. The accused was soon summoned before the court, and the witnesses upon seeing him enter said: "Yes, this is the very man whom we saw in the field attack and kill innocent men."

The court, of which Rabbi Simeon, the father of the accused, was the chief judge, found his son guilty of murder and sentenced him to death. When the accused was taken out for execution, followed by the witnesses and the judges, he said: "If I actually committed the crime that I am sentenced for, let not my death atone for my sins. But if I am not guilty of this crime, then let my death atone for all my sins."

The witnesses, moved by the pathetic manner in which the accused protested his innocence, said to the judges: "We admit that we falsified our testimony. We desire to withdraw our statement, for we did not see this man commit the crime we accused him of."

The judges were about to take the convicted youth back to court, to reconsider the case and let him free, when the culprit said: "My worthy father and judges! You well know that according to the law, a witness must not be believed when, after convicting a man, he recants his testimony." Then turning to his father, he said: "If you desire that the welfare of Israel be strengthened by your

hand, then consider me as a threshold upon which you may step without regret."

The falsely accused young man was accordingly executed. After this sad event, Rabbi Simeon issued a warning that witnesses be very carefully cross-examined.

5. *Beware of Falsehood*

One day, a man came to Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, and said to him: "I have something important to tell you, but I would like no one to be present." The rabbi accordingly ordered everybody out, and the stranger commenced to tell his tale:

"My parents were rich and respectable people. They instructed me to walk in the way of God, but I was disobedient, and committed many wrong acts. When I refused to listen to the constant admonitions of my parents, I was driven from the house. Thereupon I joined a band of robbers, and because I excelled them all in cunning and cruelty, I was chosen by them to be their chief.

"One night, we arrived in a certain village with the intention of committing a robbery. We selected one of the finest mansions in the village, broke in while the people therein were fast asleep, and bound them all with ropes so that no one might escape to tell the tale.

"When I approached the bed of one of the children, I heard him mutter to himself: 'The anger of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off

the remembrance of them from the earth.' I shuddered at the words of the sleeping child. I woke him very quietly, calmed him and said to him: 'My dear child, tell me who said these words you just now uttered?'

" 'Why, they are the words of our King David, which I have learned in school to-day.'

" 'And what else have you learned in school to-day?' I asked him.

" 'I have learned also: "They cry and the Lord hearkeneth."' "

"I immediately ordered my comrades to loosen the ties of those who were bound. Thereupon we left the village, and returned to our secret hiding place in the thick of the forest. When I looked about and noticed all the stolen goods in our possession, I felt keen remorse in my heart, and swore to abandon my comrades and to try to make a living by the work of my own hands.

"The following morning, I left my comrades, went to the city and started to work for a living. Thus a few weeks passed, then I was again seized with the desire to return to my friends in the forest and resume my robberies. On my way back to the forest I happened to pass by your college, and heard your disciples explain the verse: 'Evil shall slay the wicked.' I trembled at these words, and resolved to enter your house, O good rabbi, and confess to you that you might advise me how to overcome my evil inclination."

"If you really desire to repent," said Rabbi Simeon, "I will give you a very simple piece of advice: Beware of telling a falsehood."

The man was sorely disappointed, saying to the rabbi: "Well, I thought that you would pray to God for my sake, and that you would tell me to fast and pray so that I might be forgiven by heaven. Instead you tell me to beware of telling lies. How can that cure me, when I am such a heavy sinner?"

"Do not be dejected," said the rabbi in a kindly voice. "Only make this one resolution, never to tell a lie, and God will help you. Now, tell me. Will you ever return to your comrades in the forest to resume your evil deeds?"

"No, I will not," said the stranger with determination, and he took leave of the rabbi and went his way. When he reached home, he was met by one of his comrades, who said: "Well, chief, we are all anxiously waiting for you to lead us again. We have been informed that a royal caravan carrying much silver and gold is to pass through the forest to-night. I was sent by all our comrades to call upon you and ask you to come back to the forest, so that you may lead in the attack on the caravan. There is enough in that load to make all of us rich."

Unmindful of the promise made to the rabbi, he was about to go with his comrade to the forest. But soon he remembered the promise he had made,

that he would never return to his comrades, and turning suddenly to his companion, he said: "No, I shall not go with you."

"How can you allow an opportunity like this to go by?" pleaded the comrade. "If you do not go with me now, the caravan will safely pass by to-night with its precious load, and we shall lose a marvelous opportunity."

"I have promised not to go with you," said the ex-leader firmly, "and I can no longer change my mind, for I must refrain from telling a falsehood."

The comrade returned to the forest, and the former robber chieftain went back to his room. There he looked about for some food, for he was very hungry, but there was not even a morsel of bread to be had. While he was thus vainly searching, he observed the mistress of the house in which he lived leave the house and close the door behind her.

"Now, I have an opportunity to get into the house through the open window," he thought. "All I will take from there will be a morsel of bread with which to satisfy my hunger. For how can I go about looking for work, when I am so hungry?"

He immediately entered the house through the open window, looked about for some food, but to his great disappointment, he found none there either. He looked again and found some silverware in one of the table-drawers. Taking the sil-

verware with him, he left the house with the intention of selling the stolen goods and buying bread.

Then the one-time robber bethought himself: "Well, the woman will soon come back and look for her silverware. She will ask me if I know who has taken it, and I will have to say that I do not know. What of the oath I took at the house of Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah not to tell any lies? No, this cannot be. I must return the articles to the place from which I took them."

Thereupon he replaced the silverware. He was still hungry, very hungry indeed, but he was a happy man. He firmly withstood many temptations and he became a changed man.

6. *Three Hundred Nazarites*

One day, three hundred Nazarites came to Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, to sacrifice nine hundred offerings and thus become absolved of their vows. Rabbi Simeon found that he could annul the vows made by one hundred and fifty of the Nazarites so that it would be unnecessary for them to bring offerings. But he could find no way to annul the vows made by the others.

Rabbi Simeon came before King Alexander, and said to him: "Three hundred poor Nazarites have come to me to sacrifice offerings to God. Now, I will provide the sacrifices for one hundred and fifty of them, if you provide offerings for the other one hundred and fifty." The king agreed to this

suggestion, and he provided offerings for the one hundred and fifty Nazarites whose vows had not been annulled.

Thereafter people slandered Rabbi Simeon before King Alexander, saying: "O sire, Simeon ben Shetah mocked you when he told you that he would provide half of the Nazarites with offerings. In reality, only one hundred and fifty Nazarites had to offer sacrifices, and not three hundred. He misrepresented the facts to you. He took all the sacrifices from you, while of his own he gave none."

The king grew very angry, and was about to punish the rabbi for his misrepresentation. But the rabbi was informed of the king's intentions, escaped and hid in a secret cave.

After some time, Persian envoys sat at table with King Alexander, and they said to him: "On our previous visit, there was an old man present who delighted us with his great wisdom. Pray, sire, where is he now?"

"First he lied to me and then he fled," replied the king.

"We would very much like to have him come here again, so that we may benefit by his wisdom," said the envoys.

"Please send for your brother," said the king turning to Queen Alexandra, "for you undoubtedly know of his whereabouts."

"Sire, I know where he is hiding," said the queen; "but give me your ring to send to him as a sign that you give him your solemn word that no harm will befall him."

The king removed his ring and gave it to one of his chamberlains to take it to the rabbi in hiding.

When Rabbi Simeon entered the palace, he was asked by the king: "Why did you flee?"

"I was told that you were angry with me, O sire," said the aged rabbi; "so that I thought it best to stay away until your anger had subsided."

"Why have you mocked me?" asked the king with some indignation.

"O sire, I never did mock you," said the rabbi. "You gave to one hundred and fifty Nazarites of your money, and I gave to the other one hundred and fifty of my knowledge; for I found an opening for them to have their vows nullified."

"Why did you not thus state the matter to me originally?" asked the king.

"If I had told you the truth, you would not have given of your money," answered the rabbi.

7. Rabbi Simeon the Fearless

Once one of the slaves of King Alexander killed a person. Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, as chief of the judges, sent a summons to the king in the name of the court, which read: "Alexander Jannaeus,

your slave so and so has murdered a person, and he must appear in court for trial."

King Alexander sent his slave to be tried, but the judges sent a summons again that the king must appear in person when his slave was being tried for murder.

When the king made his appearance in the court room, the judges hastily put a chair for him next to Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah, the chief of the judges. Rabbi Simeon became angry at this and, addressing the king, he said: "King Jannaeus, rise to your feet, so that testimony may be brought against you; for it is written: 'Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord.'"

"Not if you alone say so," said the king. "If the other members of the court, too, will tell me to rise, I will do so, but not otherwise."

Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah turned to his right for an opinion, but the judges lowered their heads; he then turned to his left, and the judges on that side, too, lowered their heads. "O you, who hesitate to do justice!" exclaimed the chief judge. "May He who knows man's thought come and punish you!"

At once the Angel Gabriel descended and pressed the judges into the ground. King Alexander became terror-stricken. Then said Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah to him: "King Jannaeus, rise to your feet, so that witnesses may produce testi-

mony against you. And not for me do you rise, but for the One at whose word the world came into existence."

Alexander Jannaeus at once rose and the trial against his slave proceeded without interruption.

CHAPTER VII

HONI HA-M'AGGEL AND HIS DESCENDANTS

1. *Rain from Heaven*



ONCE there was a drought in the land of Israel. More than half of the month of Adar passed, and no rain came down. The people prayed to God for rain, but their prayers remained unanswered. They then came to Honi ha-M'aggel, a saintly man, and asked him that he pray to God for rain.

"Return home," said the saintly Honi to the people; "take the ovens that you have prepared for the Passover into your houses, so that they may not get spoiled when the rain comes down."

When he was informed that the ovens had been taken into the houses, Honi prayed to God that He cause rain to come down upon the earth, but his prayer remained unanswered. Honi then drew a circle around him, stood in the center of it, and prayed thus: "Master of the world! Thy people turned to me for help, for they consider me one of Thy trusted servants. By Thy great Name do I swear that I will not stir from this place, until Thou hast pity on Thy children."

Thereupon a few drops of rain came down, and Honi's disciples said to him: "Master, life is granted us by Heaven only for your sake. It seems to us that this slight rainfall has come down only for the purpose of absolving you from your oath."

Still standing in the center of the circle, Honi said: "I did not pray for this kind of rain; I want heavier rain to come down, so that all pits and water cisterns may be filled."

Rain then commenced to come down in torrents. It lasted for some length of time, and the fall was so great that there was danger that the rain might turn out to be a curse instead of a blessing. The disciples then again approached Honi, and said to him: "Life in this world is granted us by Heaven only for your sake, O master. It appears to us that this rain comes down only for the purpose of destroying the world."

Honi commenced to pray again: "I have not prayed for rain to come down in torrents; I have asked for rain that will bring plenty to the land." The rain then began to fall down in a natural way, but it lasted for a very long time, so that there was more than enough. The people then came to Honi and said: "Master, as you prayed for the rain to come down, we ask you now to pray for the rain to cease."

"Honi then prayed in this wise: "Master of the world! Thy people Israel whom Thou hast brought forth from the land of Egypt can bear

neither too much nor too little of Thy bounty. When Thou wast wroth with them and causedst no rain to fall, they were unable to bear it. Now Thou hast bestowed too much of Thy blessing upon them, and they are unable to bear it either. May it be Thy will, O Lord, that the rain cease to fall, so that there may be relief for Thy people."

No sooner had Honi finished his prayer, than strong winds began to blow, dispersing the clouds, and the sun began to shine brightly.

Rabbi Simeon ben Shetah was displeased at the unseemly tone of Honi's prayer. He sent a letter to Honi which read: "Were you not Honi, I would put a ban upon you. For should your prayer have remained unanswered, you would have brought desecration upon the name of God. But what shall I do to you? You sin before God, yet He does your will. Of you it was said (Prov. xxiii, 25): 'Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.'"

2. *Honi ha-M'aggel Sleeps for Seventy Years*

One day, Honi happened to be walking along the road and he noticed an elderly man planting a carob-tree near his house. Honi inquired of the man: "How long does it take for this tree to produce fruit?"

"It takes seventy years for it to bear fruit," answered the old man.

"Do you believe that you can live seventy more years to derive benefit from the fruit of this tree?" asked Honi.

"I found carob-trees in this world," replied the old man. "Just as my ancestors planted the trees for my sake, so do I plant this tree for the sake of those that will follow me."

Without commenting upon the reply of the old man, Honi sat down to partake of food, when a deep sleep fell over him. A rock sprang up near the place where Honi lay fast asleep, and the rock grew into the form of a tent until it encircled completely the sleeping saint. Thus he slumbered for seventy years in the tent-like rock, protected from rain, sun, and wild beasts.

At the end of seventy years, the tent-like rock unfolded itself, and Honi awoke from his long sleep. He noticed a man picking carobs from the tree he had seen planted, and Honi asked in amazement: "Are you the one who planted this carob-tree?"

"No, I am not," came the reply. "It was my father's father who planted it."

"I must have been sleeping then for seventy years," said Honi in an undertone.

Honi went to his house, and asked: "Where is the son of Honi ha-M'aggel?"

"His son is dead, but his grandson is still alive," was the information he received.

"I am Honi ha-M'aggel," he stated, but no one

would believe him. He then went to the college, and he heard the sages discuss a certain law. They said: "This law is as clear to us now, as it used to be clear in the days of Honi ha-M'aggel. In his days, whenever something difficult arose, they would ask him and he would clarify everything for them."

"I am Honi," stated the visitor, but no one would believe him, and he was shown some disrespect. He then prayed to God for death. His prayer was granted, and at once the soul left the saintly body of Honi ha-M'aggel.

3. *Abba Hilkiyah*

Abba Hilkiyah was the grandson of Honi ha-M'aggel, and whenever there was a drought, the people would ask him to pray to God for rain. His prayers were always heard, and his will was done by Heaven.

Once, when there was a drought in the land, two sages were selected to go to Abba Hilkiyah and ask him to pray for rain. Upon reaching his house, the two scholars were told that Abba Hilkiyah was working somewhere in the field. The scholars then went to the field and found him engaged in ploughing. They saluted him, but he made no reply to their salutation. All day long, Abba paid no attention to his visitors.

Toward evening, Abba placed a bundle of wood and his plough on one shoulder, his robe on the

other shoulder, and started for home. While walking, he did not put on his shoes, but when he reached a stream which he had to cross, he put them on. When he passed through briars and thistles, he raised his garments to prevent them from being torn. Before Abba reached town, his wife came out to meet him. When they reached their home, his wife entered first, he himself next, and the scholars third. They sat down at table, but Abba did not invite the scholars to partake of his food. Abba broke the bread, gave his elder son one slice, and to his younger son he gave two slices.

When they finished their meal, Abba Hilkiyah said to his wife in an undertone: "I know that these two men have come here to ask me to pray for rain. Let us go up to the attic, before they have an opportunity to make that request of me. We will pray there together for rain to come down, and God will hearken to our prayer. The two scholars will not know that it was due to our supplications, and therefore will not thank us for it."

The pious woman consented, and together they ascended to the attic. There Abba stood in one corner, and his wife in the other corner, and they prayed to God for rain. A cloud laden with rain appeared first from the side which the woman occupied. Then both man and wife came down to talk to their visitors.

"What is the object of your visit, gentlemen?" asked Abba.

"We have come here to petition you that you pray for rain," replied the two scholars.

"Praised be the Almighty who has spared you the necessity of petitioning Abba Hilkiyah for rain," said the meek Abba.

"We well know that rain has just come down because of your prayers," said the two scholars; "for we have seen you and your pious wife stand in opposite corners of the attic and pray. But before we go we would ask you, O master, to explain to us several things that we fail to understand."

"If I know the answer to those things, I shall not withhold it from you," said Abba.

"Why did you refuse to reply to our salutations in the field?" asked the scholars.

"Because I am a day laborer," replied Abba. "I am hired by the day, and I was afraid lest I waste my employer's time by answering your salutation."

"Why did you put the bundle of wood on one shoulder and the robe on the other?"

"This robe I borrowed from one of my neighbors to wear when I return home after my day's work. When I thought of the wood that I had to bring home, I did not wish to put on the robe and carry the wood on it, because I have not borrowed it for that purpose."

"Why did you not put on your sandals all the way, but only when you reached the stream?"

"Because the road lay open before me, and I could take care while walking; but I could not know what was at the bottom of the stream; there might have been something that would hurt my feet."

"Why did you raise your clothes when you passed through thistles and thorns, and rather allowed your feet to be injured by the thorns?"

"Because damage done to the flesh is curable; but damage caused to garments is incurable."

"Why did you not invite us to sit down and have bread with you, as is the custom?"

"Because I had very little bread, and therefore I did not wish to extend a false invitation to you, and receive thanks for it."

"Why did you give your elder son but one slice of bread, and to the younger one, two slices?"

"Because the older one is home all day, and the younger one is at school all day."

"Why is it that the cloud appeared from the direction of your wife's corner first?"

"Because she gives bread to the poor and her relief is an immediate one; while I give money to the poor, and my relief is indirect. There is also a further reason. We used to have very wicked neighbors who would torment us a great deal. When their conduct became absolutely unbearable, I cursed them and prayed to God that he take

their lives. But my wife, upon hearing me pray thus, said to me: 'Not thus is it proper to pray. I pray to God that He give them a good heart and that they repent of their evil ways.' And her prayer was heard in heaven; for our neighbors from that day on turned a new leaf and improved their conduct daily until they became very good people."

4. *Hanan Haneheba*

Hanan, the son of Honi's daughter, was a very pious man, but at the same time very modest and meek. For this reason people were wont to call him "Hanan haneheba," which means: "Hanan hides himself in his modesty."

Once there was a drought in the land, and the sages knew that the prayers of the modest Hanan would be answered, but they also knew that the meek Hanan would not pray for rain. What were they to do? At length, they called for some school children, and said to them: "Go to Father Hanan, and ask him that he pray to God for rain."

The school children went to Hanan, pulled at the tails of his robe, and said: "O father, father, please give us rain."

Touched by the pleas of the school children, Hanan prayed thus to the Holy One, praised be His Name: "Master of the world, cause rain to descend for the sake of these children who do not know how to differentiate between the Father who

is able to give rain and the father who is unable to give rain."

Hanan's prayer had the desired effect, and rain descended in abundance upon the earth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAT AND THE WELL

1. *Shulamith*



HERE lived a man in Bethlehem-Judah, who had a very fair daughter, Shulamith by name. One day the father of the fair maiden said to her: "Put on your best attire, take this basketful of first ripe fruit, and go with the other young folks to Jerusalem to celebrate."

Shulamith was accompanied by her father to the Mountains of Bethlehem, where they met a company of pilgrims going on foot to Jerusalem. He took leave of his daughter, and told her to join the company. Shulamith turned around to see her father go, and watched him until she lost sight of him. In the meantime, the company of people had continued their journey up the mountain passes, and when Shulamith turned to join them, they were no longer in sight.

Shulamith went first one way, then another, but was unable to find her way either to the company going up to Jerusalem, or to the road leading back



Shulamith looked down into the well

to Bethlehem. Thus she walked for hours, unable to retrace her step, until she became fatigued and frightened. "What will become of me," she thought, "all alone in the mountains, and no sign of either man or dwelling?"

Noon came. The sun was very hot, and Shulamith became very thirsty. She looked about for water to drink, until she found a well. There was a rope hanging on to the side of the well, but there was no bucket attached to it with which to draw water from the well. She looked down into the well, and noticed that the water was pure and sparkling. Then she let herself down to the bottom of the well by the rope. She quenched her thirst, and then tried to climb up the rope to get out of the well, but she was unable to do so. The more she tried, the weaker her hands grew, and the slighter her chance to escape death in the well. All that she could do was to pray to God for help. She prayed and prayed until she became tired of praying, and then she simply wept in a loud voice.

2. *The Oath*

At that very moment, a young man, on his way back to Jerusalem, his home town, had likewise lost his way in the mountains, and was wandering through the passes. Suddenly he heard the voice of a human being weeping. He walked in the direction of the sound, until he reached the neighborhood of the well. He stood at a distance, and

shouted: "Who is it that is calling for help from the depths of the earth?"

To the young man's great amazement, a girl's voice responded: "Pray help me get out of this well, for I am lost."

"Are you a human being or a demon in disguise?" asked the young man, much surprised.

"I am a human being," the voice answered; "help me and the good God will reward you for your good deed."

On hearing the name of God mentioned, the young man plucked up courage and approached the well. He looked into it, but it was so deep that he was unable to discern the form of a human being, and he asked again: "Are you indeed a human being, or a demon in disguise? If you are a human being, swear to me that you are a descendant of man."

The voice reassured the young man, and he said: "Hold tight to the rope, and I will pull you up."

The young man was dazzled by the beauty of the maiden whom he had drawn up from the well. He said: "I dwell in Jerusalem; my father is a priest in the Temple, and is a man of affluent means. Will you consent to be my wife?"

"I am very grateful to you for saving my life," said the maiden; "but your request I cannot grant until I have asked my father; but I know that he will consent."

"Swear to me," said the young man, "that you

will be my wife, if your father will give his consent."

"I swear it," said Shulamith; "but pray tell me your name."

"My name is Absalom," said the young lover.

"Now, Absalom," said Shulamith, "will you also take an oath that you will marry no one else but me?"

"I swear to that," said Absalom.

"But who will be witness to our oath?" asked Shulamith.

A cat happened to pass by the young lovers at that moment, and Shulamith said: "The heavens, this cat and this well shall be witnesses to our vow."

"So be it," solemnly replied Absalom.

The young couple found their way by ascending to the top of a mountain, Shulamith returned safely home, and Absalom continued his way to Jerusalem.

3. *The Punishment*

Attracted by the great beauty of Shulamith, many young men of all stations in life came to ask her father for her hand. Many times her father consented, but each and every time, Shulamith feigned insanity. She would laugh and cry at one and the same time, and at times she would remain silent for many long hours.

Her kind father, for she had no mother, was

very much worried over her. Whenever she would reject a suitor of high station in life, her father would ask her for the cause, and her only reply would be: "The cat and the well." The kind father would then weep: "Woe is me, my child is bereft of her senses; what can I do to help her?" It was soon known in all Bethlehem, that the fairest of all maidens had become insane, and that no one could cure her.

Absalom, on the other hand, forget all about his oath to Shulamith when he reached Jerusalem and there beheld so many graceful maidens. He soon selected one of the beautiful maidens and married her.

Abigail, the wife of Absalom, was as pious as she was fair, and she was very happy with her husband.

After some time Abigail gave birth to a boy. When the child was three months old, a cat suddenly appeared in the baby's room. With one bound, the cat was at the throat of the child and choked him to death. The intruder vanished as suddenly as it had come. For many days, Absalom and his wife mourned the loss of their child.

Abigail then gave birth to another son, and she took the greatest possible care to guard her newly born son against any mishaps. She would not entrust the child into the care of a nurse, but minded him herself day and night.

One day Abigail, taking her baby in her arms,

as was her habit, took a walk in the garden. She passed by a well, from the depth of which she heard the sweet chirping of birds. Curious to see what was in the well, she stepped over and looked into it, holding the child tightly in her arms. As if drawn by some supernatural force, the child slipped out of her hands and fell into the deep water of the well.

With torn garments and with bitter lamentations, the unfortunate mother entered the house, and told her husband of what had happened to their second son. "Now," she said to her husband, "if our children had died a natural death, I would accept my fate without complaint. But since they died in such unnatural ways, it must be that you possess some secret which you do not care to disclose to me. Please tell me: What is the cause of all this?"

"My dear Abigail," said the very much grieved Absalom, "I must conceal nothing from you, since God has punished us thus." Then he told her all about his meeting with Shulamith, and about the oath they took which was witnessed by a cat and a well.

"Much to my sorrow and regret, we must separate," said Abigail firmly. "You violated your oath and you have been justly punished. You must now make amends by searching for the fair Shulamith and marrying her, as you have sworn to her."

4. *A Happy Reunion*

After he had divorced his beloved Abigail, Absalom at once went to the road leading to Bethlehem to search for Shulamith. Toward evening he reached the outskirts of Bethlehem where he met some shepherds, and he inquired of them: "Do you know of a fair maiden in your town whose name is Shulamith?"

"Who does not know of Shulamith?" they answered. "Why even every child knows of the fate of this fair maiden."

"Why, what has happened to her?" asked Absalom in great terror.

"This fairest of all maidens has suddenly become insane, and there is no cure for her," stated the shepherds. "She rejects every suitor; she screams upon meeting them; she tears their clothes; and all she says to her father is: 'The cat and the well.' That good girl has the sympathy of every inhabitant of the town."

Absalom shuddered at the mention of the words, "Cat and well," and he proceeded on his journey. Arrived in Bethlehem, he at once visited the father of Shulamith, and said to him: "Good man, I have come to ask you for the hand of your daughter Shulamith."

"In vain, in vain," sighed the dejected father. "Many young men have come to ask me for her hand before you, but she rejects them all with dis-

dain. God has deprived her of her reason, and all she says to me is: 'The cat and the well.' There is no use trying any more."

"I am willing to marry her in spite of it all," said Absalom with determination. "But one thing I request of you: permit me to talk in private to your daughter."

"I grant your request gladly," said the amazed father; "but take care when you are alone with her, for she is apt to do you harm."

Absalom assured the father that he was not at all afraid, and he was accordingly led to the apartment, where the disappointed Shulamith was kept in isolation.

Seeing another suitor enter her room, Shulamith began to rave and scream as usual, without even looking at the intruder. But Absalom went over quietly to her and whispered: "O my dear Shulamith, do you remember the story of 'The Cat and the Well?'" As soon as Shulamith heard these words mentioned, she calmed down, and was ready to listen, and Absalom continued: "Remember how you fell into the well in the mountains of Bethlehem, how I saved you, and how you swore to me that you would marry no one else but me."

Shulamith raised her head, embraced Absalom, and exclaimed: "So you have come to fulfil your oath. Now I am very, very happy."

Both of them ran to the father of Shulamith and together told him of what had happened.

The overjoyed father said: "May the Name of the Lord be praised. It is His will that you become husband and wife. Let His will be done."

To the great joy and astonishment of all the inhabitants of Bethlehem, the noble Absalom married the good fair maiden, Shulamith. The good, pious couple lived in happiness ever after in the holy city of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX

HEROD

1. *The Idumean Slave Becomes King of Judæa*



HEROD, the son of Antipater, an Idumean slave in the king's court, was once accused of murder and summoned to appear before the court. Herod, who was popular with the Romans, appeared in court escorted by a legion of Roman soldiers, for he feared lest he be condemned and executed by the judges.

The judges who made up the highest court in Jerusalem, upon seeing the Roman legion, were afraid to commence the proceedings. Then Shemaiah, one of the two chief judges, rose to his feet and said: "You are afraid to convict the man who is guilty of shedding innocent blood. Behold, a time will come when this murderer, of whom you are afraid now, will issue a royal decree that all of you be put to the sword!"

Encouraged by the words of Shemaiah, the judges were about to begin the trial. But Herod

escaped with the help of the Roman soldiers, and the trial could not commence without him.

One day, Herod heard a heavenly voice calling down from heaven: "Any slave who will now rebel against his master will be successful." The Idumean slave was thus encouraged. His plots were successful. At length, he killed all the members of the Hasmonean family, which was then the reigning family in Judæa. Herod spared only one fair young maiden whom he loved and whom he wished to marry.

This fair maiden became aware of the intention of Herod, and she resolved: "I shall not marry the Idumean slave who has murdered all my father's family." Then she went up to the roof of the palace, and proclaimed: "Know you, that whosoever will henceforth come and claim that he is a descendant of the Hasmonean House, is telling a falsehood. For out of the whole family there was only one little girl left, and she is now taking her life by throwing herself from the roof of the palace." With these words, the fair maiden dropped from the roof, and was instantly killed.

Herod took the body of the maiden he had loved, and kept it in honey for seven years. "Let people believe that I have married the daughter of a king," said Herod to himself; "and let them think that I am, therefore, eligible to be their king."

When Herod ascended the throne of his victims,

he thought of the insults that had been heaped upon him by the judges who had tried him for murder. He killed every one of those learned men, but spared the life of Shemaiah, whose prophecy of the power of Herod turned out to be true.

2. The Temple of Herod

The people of Judaea were very much opposed to the rule of the Idumean slave, both because of his foreign descent and because of his unsurpassed cruelty. Herod was aware that he was unpopular with the people over whom he ruled, and he likewise knew that it was the sages, the leaders of the people, who were the cause of his unpopularity. He therefore ordered that all the sages be put to death. He spared only the life of Baba ben Buta, who was famous for his great learning, piety and wisdom. Him he saved for selfish motives, for he knew that Baba ben Buta was the wisest counsellor he could obtain.

The cruel Herod, however, could not bear the idea that one sage should remain alive and enjoy the sight of the world. He ordered that a wreath of leeches be placed around the head of the sage he had spared, and thus had his eyes put out.

One day, Herod entered the room of the blind sage, and sitting down in front of him, said, in a disguised voice: "Have you given thought to what this Idumean slave has been doing?"

"What can I do to him?" said Baba ben Buta sadly.

"Why, just curse him," said Herod.

"It is written: 'Curse not the king, no, not even in thy thought,'" said the blind sage.

"But this one is no king," said Herod.

"Conceding that he is only a rich man," argued Baba, "it is written: 'And curse not the rich in thy bedchamber.'"

"One is not permitted to curse a prince only when he is God-fearing, but not when he is guilty of shedding innocent blood," argued Herod.

"I fear lest one overhear my curse, and inform Herod of it," replied the sage.

"No one could inform him of it, for there is no one present here except you and me," said the cunning Herod.

"But it is written: 'For a bird of the air shall carry the voice,'" replied Baba.

"I am the very man," said Herod. "Had I known that sages are so careful and scrupulous, I would not have killed them. Now tell me what remedy is there for a man like me?"

"You have rendered dark the shining light of the world by slaying the wise men, it is your duty to rekindle that light by building a new Temple," advised the sage.

"But how can I do it, without obtaining permission from the Roman government?" asked Herod.

"Send envoys to Rome to ask for permission,"

advised Baba again; "but let them be in no haste. Let them spend a year in getting there; let them tarry a year at Rome; and then let them spend a third year in returning to Jerusalem. In the meantime you will be able to accomplish your task, and finish the construction of the Temple."

Herod followed the advice of the blind sage. He sent envoys to Rome, and in the meantime he employed a great force to rebuild the Temple. During the construction of the Temple, no rain would fall in the daytime. It would rain only at night, and in the morning a strong wind would disperse the clouds, and the sun would shine again upon the workers of the Temple. The people were elated over this omen, for they knew that their work was pleasing in the sight of God.

At the end of the three years, when the Temple was nearing completion, the envoys brought back a message from Rome, which read thus: "If you have not demolished the old, let it remain as it is; if you have demolished the old, do not replace it by a new structure; if you have already destroyed the old structure, and replaced it by a new one—a disobedient slave craves permission after he commits the act. You now have royal dignity, but your pedigree record is here with us, showing that you are neither a king, nor the son of a king—Herod the slave has become a free man."

CHAPTER X

THE FORLORN SON

1. *Jonadab*



IN those days, there lived a man in Jerusalem whose name was Jonadab. He was famed for his great wealth and great generosity. One day he presented himself before Herod, and said to him: "O sire, if you desire to be respected and honored by the people, establish your throne in righteousness, and rule your subjects with mercy and kindness." Herod became angry at the advice of Jonadab, and said: "How dare you come before me and advise me how to rule my subjects?" And he told Jonadab to leave the palace at once.

From that day on, Herod sought every opportunity to persecute the good Jonadab. When things became unbearable for Jonadab, he left Jerusalem with his family, consisting only of himself, his wife and his only daughter Z'mirah, and settled in an estate somewhere near Mount Lebanon. Every year the good Jonadab, after harvesting his field, would send many wagon-loads of food for the poor of Jerusalem.

Many days passed, and the wife of Jonadab died. Jonadab dug her grave in the garden near his home, and over the grave he erected a circular sepulchre. There the fair Z'mirah would come every day to pray and weep for her mother.

One day, as Z'mirah was in the vault praying, she heard the sound of footsteps. She looked about and saw a young man with locks of hair reaching to his loins stand at the entrance to the vault. She understood by his appearance that he was a Nazarite and therefore harmless, and she asked: "What may you want here?"

"All I want, fair maiden," said the youthful Nazarite, "is that you permit me to hide myself here in the vault. For the cruel king Herod has issued an order that all the pious Nazarites be put to death. Some of us have escaped, and are scattered all over. We were hiding in the Lebanon, when suddenly we heard the sound of hoofs and of trumpets. We understood that the troops of Herod were after us, and we left the Lebanon to look for shelter elsewhere."

"You may certainly hide here until your pursuers leave the Lebanon," said the kind Z'mirah. "Do not leave the sepulchre till dark, and then I will provide you with food for the journey before you."

In the evening, Z'mirah brought a bag full of food for the young Nazarite, and also gave him thirty gold coins. Taking the gold bracelet from

her wrist, she said: "Here, you may have this as well to buy food for yourself and for your friends. May the good God be with you and guard you on your way."

2. *The Wedding of Z'mirah*

Jonadab had a very good friend in Hebron, whose name was Uzziel. One day, Jonadab received a letter from his friend Uzziel, which read: "My dear Jonadab, I know that you have a daughter who is fair and kind-hearted. I have a son who is learned in the Torah of God and who is God-fearing and kind. My wish is that you permit your daughter to become the wife of my son Abinadab. If you will agree to this, I, together with my family, shall come to you to celebrate their wedding. Of course, I am ready to give my good son a great part of the wealth which the good Lord has graciously given me. Please answer by the same messenger that I am sending to you."

"Yes," said Jonadab, "I well remember that Abinadab when he was yet a child. Even then he showed signs of ability and kindness." He then wrote to Uzziel that he agreed to the union, and delivered the letter to the messenger.

Three months passed, and one of the servants informed Jonadab that some one who had come from Hebron would like to see him. The visitor made his appearance and said: "I am Abinadab

the son of Uzziel, your lifelong friend from Hebron."

No sooner had he said these words than the kind Jonadab embraced him, and asked: "And how is your father; is he well?"

"About two months ago," said Abinadab, "my father became very ill. We called for the best physicians to cure him, but to no avail. When my father saw that his end was near, he called for me and said: 'My son, I know that I am going to die. Now, my son, sell all my property, take your mother with you and go to my friend Jonadab. There you shall marry his daughter and stay in his house for ever.' My dear father died soon after. The death of my father grieved my beloved mother and she, too, died before the seven days of mourning were over."

The good Jonadab exclaimed: "How I grieve for you, my friend Uzziel, that you are not alive to see your son married!"

The numerous slaves who had come with the young Abinadab, now brought into the house the great wealth they had conveyed from Hebron on the backs of camels. When they finished their task, Abinadab addressed his slaves: "You have been very faithful to me all these days, now you may have your liberty, and from now on you will be free men." So saying, he handed each and every one of them one hundred gold coins, and

also presented each and every one of them with an ass.

Jonadab, his wife, and his daughter Z'mirah were amazed at the great wealth of Abinadab and also at the generosity of his heart. They were all extremely pleased with the young suitor, and after the lapse of a few days, the wedding of Abinadab and Z'mirah was celebrated with great pomp.

3. *The Culprit Discovered*

During the seven days of the wedding celebration, every guest was merry and joyful, but Abinadab himself had an expression of grief and sorrow on his countenance. Jonadab inquired of his son-in-law what the cause of his sadness might be, but Abinadab replied: "It is nothing but a temporary indisposition, and it will soon pass."

One day, when Z'mirah entered the chamber of Abinadab, she found him kneeling in prayer, and his eyes were red with tears. "Would you not tell me the cause of your deep grief?" asked Z'mirah. "Perhaps I can be of help to you."

"Ah," sighed Abinadab, "there is no use of your trying to find out the cause of my distress. There is no man on earth to whom I can confide this secret. I am afraid I will have to die with it."

Z'mirah told her father of the reply she had received from Abinadab, and added: "It is very

likely that my Abinadab is simply ill, and we must try to cure him."

The best physicians were summoned to examine Abinadab, but they were unable to find any malady of which he might be suffering. Abinadab grew more melancholy as the days passed by. He spent many days in fasting and in prayers. Whenever he saw a slave, he redeemed him and set him free. Even the slaves of Jonadab were set free by Abinadab, for he paid the price for them. He spent all of his time in seclusion in his chamber, and left it only to join the family at table.

After some time, Z'mirah gave birth to a son. Jonadab made a very elaborate feast for his friends. The visitors assembled, and when they congratulated the young father of the newlyborn baby, he made his response by tearing his clothes, and uttering loud cries of despair. To the sore disappointment of Jonadab and his family, all the visitors left the house quietly one by one, as if they had been attending a funeral.

One evening, while Abinadab was sitting with the family at table, the sounds of trumpets and of hoofs were heard from the direction of the Lebanon. Suddenly one of the domestics appeared and said with fright: "O master, an armed band of soldiers have surrounded our house."

"What may they want with us?" asked Jonadab in wonderment.

No sooner had he made this remark than the door of the house opened with a crash, and a captain and ten armed soldiers appeared. The captain turned to Jonadab and said: "Good sir, I have royal orders to bring your son-in-law to Jerusalem, whether alive or dead, for he is guilty of a very serious offense."

"You are gravely mistaken," said the good Jonadab in bewilderment. "My saintly son-in-law cannot be guilty of a crime."

"I, I am the man you are looking for," interrupted Abinadab. "Here, tie my hands and feet with fetters and take me to Jerusalem that justice may be done."

Z'mirah, her father and her friends all fainted at the sight of Abinadab in chains. He was carried off to Jerusalem as a criminal.

4. *Z'mirah in Jerusalem*

When the excitement subsided, Jonadab set out for Jerusalem to discover the nature of his son-in-law's crime. At Jerusalem he was told that his son-in-law had been for many years the leader of a band of robbers; that he had been sought all over the country, until he was discovered near the Lebanon and there arrested; that his only punishment could be the gallows.

The pious Jonadab returned home, and said to his daughter: "Now, my good Z'mirah, forget Abinadab, and let him suffer the punishment he

deserves. Cursed be the day on which you became his wife."

"No," pleaded Z'mirah. "It is impossible. My good husband cannot be guilty of any crime. I will not believe it, even if I hear it from his own mouth. I must go to Jerusalem, and ask the king to free my husband."

Stricken with grief, the good Jonadab fell seriously ill, and died shortly after. Z'mirah was now left alone in the world except for her little baby son. Nevertheless she lost no courage. She was determined to act in the hope of releasing her husband from prison.

When the days of mourning were over, Z'mirah set out for Jerusalem. She arrived there when thousands upon thousands of people had gathered from all over the country to celebrate the Harvest Festival in the Holy City. Everybody was joyful; everybody was happy, but poor Z'mirah was downcast and gloomy, and often shed tears of grief while walking through the crowded streets of the busy city.

Once she was met by an old man who spoke to her: "Tell me the cause of your distress, good woman."

This was the first opportunity that Z'mirah had to give utterance in words to her sad plight, and she willingly told the old man all about it. She also told him of her object in coming to Jerusalem. The old man said: "It is not a very easy matter to

get an audience with the king, but, I believe, I have a good advice for you. To-morrow is the day when the king visits the Temple to participate in the celebration of the festival. He then rides in state from his palace to the Temple through the streets of the city. You should therefore mingle with the crowd, and when the royal chariot draws nigh, you should step out of the crowd and throw yourself in the way of the horses. The king, upon seeing you, will order the driver to stop the chariot, and he will ask you what your desire may be. Then you will have an opportunity to tell the king whatever you please. In the meantime," added the old man, "you and your child may stay in my house."

On the morrow, the king was driven with great pomp to the Temple, through streets that were lined with people. Z'mirah was one of the spectators, and when she noticed the king drawing nigh, she pushed her way through the crowd and knelt in front of the horses that drew the king's chariot. In her arms, she held her baby.

The king, upon seeing a woman in front of his chariot, ordered the driver to halt. He made a sign for the woman to come over, and then he said to her: "What ails you, my daughter?"

"O sire," Z'mirah said among sobs, "my good virtuous husband, Abinadab the son of Uzziel, and the son-in-law of Jonadab, was arrested and thrown into prison for no reason whatever. And

now, alas, he is soon to lose his life for no wrong at all."

"I am very sorry for you, poor woman," said the king; "but I am unable to do anything for you. This man has deceived you. His name is not Abinadab, but Raamiah. He was the leader of a robber band for many years, and during that time he has shed innocent blood."

"O sire," interrupted the unfortunate Z'mirah, "will you grant me the favor to see my husband but once before he dies."

"You have my permission for that," said the king, and he ordered the driver to proceed.

5. *The True Story*

On the following day, Z'mirah visited the prison where her husband was confined. The keeper led her to the convict, and when she beheld him, she broke into loud weeping.

"Alas, my good Z'mirah, pray forget me," pleaded the prisoner. "For I have deceived you and your poor father, and have brought everlasting disgrace and misfortune upon you and your family. So please forget me and shun the memory of me, the memory of a fearful criminal."

"Whether you were pious or wicked in the past is immaterial," said Z'mirah with determination. "Now I am your wife, and death alone will separate us." And so saying, she broke into weeping again.

When the first shock of the sad meeting was over, the prisoner said: "Now, I am going to tell you the real story of my life, and it may help you in raising our son.

"When I was fifteen years old, my beloved mother died. My father was very seldom at home, because he was a captain in the king's army. Therefore, before her death, my mother said to my father: 'Pray take good care of our only son. See to it that he is guided on the right path, and that he associate not with the wicked and the worthless.'

"My mother died soon thereafter, and, after the lapse of some time, my father married another woman. This woman hated me to the core of her heart, she accused me of wrongs of which I was not guilty, and thus made my life miserable and wretched.

"Unable to endure the torture any longer, I joined a band of boys who were orphans and could find no peace at home. I left my father's house, and came back only on rare occasions when my money gave out.

"My stepmother then told my father that I had joined a band of bad boys. My father gave me a good beating and warned me not to see those boys any longer. I obeyed, for I feared the wrath of my father. I decided to stay at home and not to associate any longer with bad companions.

"But my stepmother could not bear the sight

of me. She used to accuse me of all sorts of things I had not done. At last she openly said to my father: 'I am unable to bear your son any longer. He makes my life miserable. I will not be able to enjoy life, as long as he remains in the house, for he is corrupt in all his ways.'

"My father allowed himself to be persuaded by his wife, and he ordered me out of the house. I then went back to my former friends, who were very glad to see me again. They said to me: 'Nowadays there are many people who, embittered against the government, cast aside all scruples, form into small bands, and lie in wait for wayfarers whom they rob of their property. Let us also form a band, go to the forest, attack the wealthy wayfarers and rob them of their wealth, so that we may not perish with hunger.' I was very much shocked by their proposition, and indignantly refused to join them. They went their way, and I returned to the city.

"For days, I walked the streets of the city without shelter and without food. Then I began to feel the terrible pangs of hunger, and my eyes commenced to grow dim. I left town and wandered aimlessly through fields and forests until I was met by my former comrades. This time, too, they were overjoyed to see me. They gave me food and drink, and then took me over to some secret place, and said to me: 'Look at all the silver and gold we acquired while you were away.'

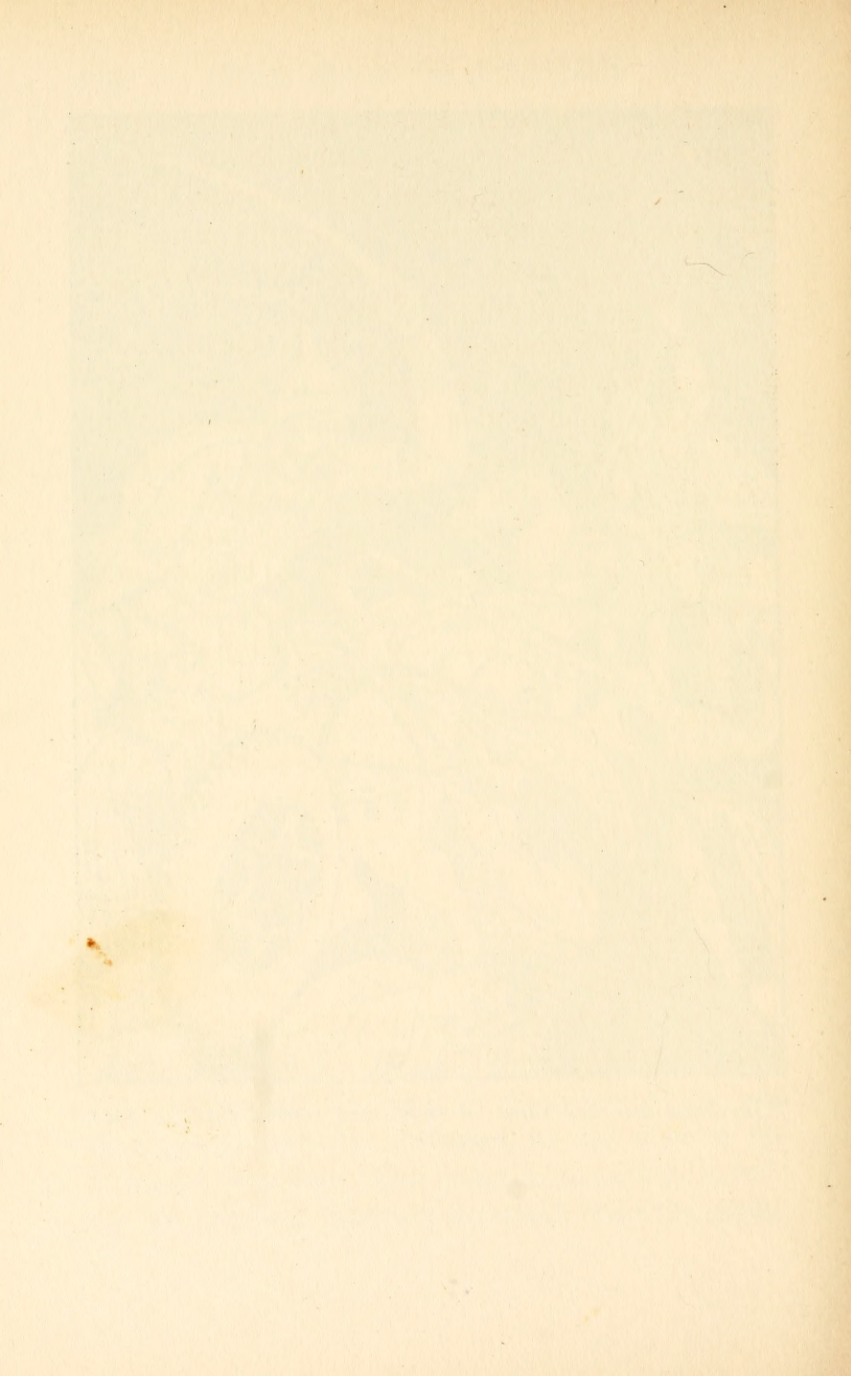
"I then decided to join them. With my aid and advice the band was even more successful in robbing innocent travelers, for I was really merciless. The band then elected me their leader. I allowed the locks of my hair to grow long, as the holy Nazarites do, and donned the robes of a Nazarene. Under this disguise, I was able to spy out wealthy residences and estates, because people were not afraid of me. I would then report to the band and they would do the rest. They would suddenly raid the homes of innocent people and rob them of their property.

"One day, we were informed that there was a great wealth of silver and gold in the house of your father. I accordingly went to spy out your father's estate, to know the entrances and so on, when I found you praying at your mother's grave. I then lied to you and told you that Herod had been after the Nazarites. When you took pity on me and gave me bread, money and even the bracelet you had worn on your wrist, I took an oath not to permit any harm to befall either you or your family, and I ordered my band to keep away from your house.

"Once our band was informed that a very rich man, accompanied by many camels laden with gold, silver and all kinds of precious things, was passing through the Lebanon, on his way to the house of Jonadab. Our band at once lay in wait for the passing caravan, attacked them on sight,



"Our band attacked them on sight, and robbed them of their wealth"



took the people into captivity, and robbed them of their wealth. I, as the leader of the group, inquired of the owner of the caravan where he had been bound for. He told me that he was going with his wife and son to celebrate the wedding of his son to the daughter of Jonadab.

"I became envious of Abinadab. 'Why should he marry the fairest and best of all maidens?' said I to myself. I then bound them all and sold them as slaves to the Philistines. Thereupon I told my band of robbers that I would no longer be their leader, and that I would have to go away from them. We divided up the wealth we had accumulated among us, and, loading my share on camels, I arrived at your house, and deceived your father by telling him that I was Abinadab.

"When, day after day, I heard the wise words of your father, his ideas of justice and kindness, I was stricken with remorse at the great wrong I had done to Uzziel and his family. I pictured them pining away in slavery under a cruel Philistine master, and I repented. I spent many days in fasting and weeping. I took pity on the poor and the needy, and bought liberty for many slaves. But the vision of the poor noble family pining away in slavery haunted me day and night. Evil thoughts and dreams tortured me by night and terrible pangs of remorse by day.

"Now I am here a doomed prisoner, sentenced to die on the gallows for all the evil I have done.

I deserve such an end, and I do not complain. Let me die, unfortunate Z'mirah. Forget the cruel Raamiah who deceived you and who brought this misfortune upon you and your family, and also upon the son that was born of our unhappy union."

6. *The Earthquake*

Z'mirah patiently listened to the story as told by Raamiah, and when it was finished, she said: "No man should consider himself guilty and lose courage. The merciful God is ready to pardon the worst sinner, if only he truly repents. No man should give up hope even when the executioner is ready to cut his throat with a sword."

Encouraged by the kind words of Z'mirah, Raamiah said: "O my good Z'mirah! If I only knew that Uzziel and his son Abinadab are still alive, I would break away from prison, go to the ends of the earth, and sell myself as a slave in their stead."

"If you could only escape from this place by some sort of a miracle," said the good Z'mirah, "then I would sell myself in slavery in the place of the mother of Abinadab."

No sooner had Z'mirah finished her words than the keeper entered and said: 'Unfortunate woman, leave this dungeon, for your husband will be led to the gallows within a very short time.'

Z'mirah uttered a loud piercing shriek upon hearing these words from the hangman. Such a

terrible shriek had never been heard since the world was called into existence. At the sound of this shriek the very earth quivered and shook. The walls of the prison collapsed, and the guards ran in terror in every direction, leaving the prisoners behind them.

"Come, let us run," said Raamiah, grasping the astonished Z'mirah by the arm. For three days and three nights, without rest, did husband and wife flee with their infant son, until they reached the Lebanon. They were pursued by no one. The earthquake wrought havoc in the city, demolishing structures and bringing terror to the inhabitants.

Raamiah and Z'mirah walked from place to place in search of Uzziel and his family, but could find no trace of them. Finally they came to a small village, and there they were addressed by one of the inhabitants in these words: "May you be blessed, my benefactor, for the good you have done to me."

"What good have I ever done to you?" asked Raamiah in amazement.

"I was a slave and you bought my liberty for me," said the villager, "and in addition to that you gave me food and some money. With the money, I bought a small farm for myself, and with the help of God, I was very successful. Then I sold the small farm, and I bought a large estate, and now I want nothing."

Raamiah was very much pleased at this report, and he replied: "My only wish is that I could locate the whereabouts of Uzziel and his son, who are now in the land of the Philistines, for I can know no rest until I find them."

"I have two Philistines working on my estate," stated the villager, "perhaps they will be able to tell you where to locate them."

Raamiah inquired of the Philistines, and he was informed that Uzziel and his family were the slaves of a certain man in Gath. Raamiah and his wife immediately returned to the Lebanon, and Z'mirah sold her father's estate. With the money in their possession, Raamiah and his wife went to Gath, located Uzziel's master, and said that they wished to purchase the liberty of Uzziel and his son. The price named by the master of the two slaves was seventy silver talents more than Raamiah and his wife possessed. Raamiah then sold himself into servitude for one year and three months to make up the deficit. and he set Uzziel and his son free.

At the end of the one year and three months, Raamiah together with his faithful wife and son went to Jerusalem. There he discovered that his father had died without leaving any other legal heir besides himself. Raamiah sold the estate of the deceased and he gave all the money he realized out of this sale to Uzziel and his son Abinadab, saying: "Please take from me all that I pos-

sess, but forgive me the wrong I have done to you."

Uzziel took the money from Raamiah and said: "We accept this from you and with all our hearts we forgive you for all the wrong you have done to us, but out of this money you must take back one hundred gold coins with which to purchase a home and a piece of land for yourself and your family."

Raamiah was very grateful for the pardon he had obtained. He took the one hundred gold coins, and then he went to some remote village where he bought a small estate for himself. There he lived in piety and led a highly virtuous life with his faithful wife Z'mirah to the end of his days. His only son he raised to fear God and to be helpful to his fellowmen.

CHAPTER XI

HILLEL THE SENIOR

1. *Hillel's Eagerness to Study*



IN Babylon at that time there lived a man named Hillel, who was filled with a burning desire for the study of the Law. He was told of the college in Jerusalem where the two great teachers Sh'maiah and Abtalyon presided and he resolved to go there and devote all his time to study.

Arriving in Jerusalem and finding that he must pay daily a small fee to the keeper of the college in order to gain admittance, Hillel decided to go to work, so that he could support his family and at the same time be able to get into the college and sit together with the students. He found some employment for which he obtained a quinarius (half a denar) a day, half of which he would give to the door-keeper of the college to let him enter, and with the other half he bought food for himself and his family.

Hillel had a brother in Jerusalem, who was a merchant and who busied himself all the time with money-making. He was a very wealthy man,

and one day he proposed to his brother Hillel: "Let us become partners: I will continue to pursue my business, and you pursue your studies. I will give you half of whatever I profit by doing business, and you will give me half of your share in the future world." Thereupon a voice called down from heaven, saying: "If a man should offer all his wealth in exchange for the Torah, he should be refused." Hillel refused to accept his brother's offer, and he continued his humble employment.

Once, Hillel was unable to find any employment, and, having no money to pay for admittance to the college, he climbed to the top of the roof. In the roof there was an aperture through which he could see inside and also hear the lectures of Sh'maiah and Abtalion. That day happened to be a Friday in the month of Tebet. A heavy snow fell and covered up the figure of Hillel who lay prostrate with his eye over the aperture. So absorbed was the eager student in the topic discussed all night at college, that he did not realize that he had been covered with snow.

In the morning, when the day dawned, Sh'maiah said to Abtalion: "Abtalion, my brother, we always get some light through the aperture but to-day it is dark. It may be that it is cloudy to-day." Both sages raised their eyes toward the aperture in the roof, and to their amazement they beheld a human figure covering the opening.

The great teachers together with their disciples

ascended the roof, where to their great surprise they saw the figure of a man who had been covered with several cubits of snow. They removed the snow from him, smeared his body with oil and placed him in front of the fire-place. Then the sages remarked: "This man is worthy that the Sabbath laws be violated for his sake."

Afterwards the sages declared: "When the very wealthy and the very poor will appear, after their death, before the Heavenly Tribunal to render an accounting of their deeds in this world, the poor man will be asked: 'Why hast thou failed to devote some of thy time to the study of the Torah?' His reply will be: 'Poverty prevented me from studying, for I have been busy during my earthly career providing my family with food.' Thereupon the Heavenly Court will ask him: 'Wert thou then in more dire circumstances than Hillel?' and pronounce him guilty."

"When the wealthy will be asked by the Heavenly Tribunal: 'Why hast thou failed to devote some of thy time to the study of the Torah?' his reply will be: 'I was too much occupied with my affairs and I could spare no time for study.' Thereupon the Heavenly Tribunal will condemn him, saying: 'Wert thou wealthier than Elazar ben Harsom, whose father had left him one thousand villages and one thousand ships plying the seas? Yet he left all his wealth, assumed the guise of a poor man and went to live in seclusion in order

that he might be able to study the Torah undisturbed."

2. *The Righteousness of Hillel*

When Hillel first came from Babylon to Jerusalem, he was forty years old, and he studied the Torah for forty years. At the end of this time his knowledge became very wide and profound, and he was elected president of the college, and chief of the Great Sanhedrin. Many disciples from distant places came to learn wisdom from the great sage, for his fame spread far and wide, not only as a great scholar, but also as a man of great modesty and meekness and of many other virtues.

One day, the disciples followed their beloved teacher out of college and asked him: "Master, where are you going?"

"I am going to perform a very meritorious act," said Hillel.

"What may it be?" asked the disciples.

"I am going to wash in the bath-house," replied Hillel.

"Is this a very meritorious deed?" inquired the disciples.

Hillel said: "My sons, you undoubtedly have noticed the images of kings that are placed in theatres and circuses, and how the man appointed to take care of them washes and cleans them, and receives his reward for it. Now, if images made by the hand of man are carefully washed and

cleaned, how much more should the image created in the likeness of God be taken care of?"

Once the disciples asked of Hillel: "Master, where are you going?"

"I am going to welcome a guest at my house," replied Hillel.

"Our master," asked the disciples in astonishment, "does a guest visit your house daily?"

"The soul sent down by God to dwell in the body is a mere guest," said Hillel. "She does not stay very long with us. We must therefore receive her kindly and satisfy her by doing her will."

Once, a distinguished visitor came to the house of Hillel. The wife of Hillel who was very pious prepared food for the visitor, and was about to set the table, when a poor man appeared at the door, and said: "To-day I am supposed to celebrate my wedding, and I have not any food in my house."

The good wife of the President of the college took all the food she had prepared and gave it to the poor man, saying: "Here, take all this for your wedding feast."

She then prepared other food and set the table. And Hillel asked: "My wife, why did it take you so long?"

After she told Hillel what had happened, Hillel remarked: "I judged you with a predisposition in

your favor, for I knew that whatever you did was for the sake of heaven."

One day, Hillel was told that there was a poor man who needed some help. Hillel invited the poor man to his house, and after inquiry discovered that the poor man was the son of a wealthy person. Before he became poor, he was accustomed to ride a horse, and have a slave run before his horse. Hillel said that every poor man should be provided with all the luxuries he had been accustomed to have before he reached the stage of poverty. He therefore bought a horse for the man, and also hired somebody to run before his horse.

Once it happened that Hillel was unable to hire anybody to run before the horse. Then Hillel himself ran before the horse for three miles. Upon hearing of Hillel's deeds, the people said: "There is no one so meek and humble as Hillel."

3. *The Golden Rule*

Shammai, a contemporary of Hillel, was a great sage, but he was not so beloved as was Hillel for the reason that he was not so lenient as Hillel in all questions of law. He was, however, very famous as a profound scholar, and he was the colleague of Hillel in the Sanhedrin.

One day, a heathen came to Shammai and said: "Great teacher, I would like to embrace your

belief, if you would teach me the Jewish religion while I stand on one foot."

Shammai, who was a very stern man, flew into a rage at the request of the heathen. With the builder's cubit-instrument which he happened to hold in his hand, he knocked the heathen down, and thundered: "Our Law cannot be learned while standing on one foot."

The heathen then went to Hillel, and made the same request of him.

The great man replied: "Yes, my son, I shall comply with your request." And he thereupon laid down the golden rule: "Do not unto thy neighbor what is hateful unto thee." Then he added: "This is the gist of the whole Law; the other laws and rules are merely explanatory of this. So now go and complete the study thereof."

4. *The Meekness of Hillel*

Once, two men made a wager that whichever succeeded in provoking Hillel to anger would receive from the other four hundred golden zuzima. One of the two said: "I will certainly provoke him to anger."

This man passed the house of Hillel on a Friday, when Hillel was washing his head. The stranger exclaimed, as he passed by the house, "Who is Hillel around here? Who is Hillel around here?"

Hillel wrapped his head in cloths, and went out

of the house to address the stranger. "What is your wish, my son?"

"I have an important question to ask you," said the stranger.

"Propound your question, my son, propound it," said Hillel.

"The question I desire to ask is this: Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?"

The chief judge of the Sanhedrin answered: "You have asked a good question. It is because they have no skilled midwives."

Without making any remark, the man walked away. In an hour, he came back to the house of the president of the college, and again exclaimed while passing by: "Who is Hillel around here? Who is Hillel around here?"

Again did the great sage enwrap himself, and again he went out and said to the stranger: "What may be your wish, my son?"

"I have a question to ask you," said the stranger.

"Propound your question, my son, do not hesitate," said the patient teacher.

"This time I desire to ask," said the stranger, "why are the eyes of the Palmyreans weak?"

"You asked a great question, my son," answered the patient sage: "It is because they live on an oasis surrounded with sand land."

The stranger walked quietly away, and at the expiration of one hour he came back, walking along near the house of Hillel. For the third

time he tried to provoke Hillel to anger, by exclaiming while passing: "Who is Hillel around here? Who is Hillel around here?"

For the third time the famous sage enwrapped himself, and, walking out of his house, again said: "What may be your wish, my son?"

"I have a question to ask," answered the stranger.

"Ask your question, and do not hesitate," urged on the meek sage.

"This time I want to know," said the stranger, "why the feet of the Africans are broad."

"This is certainly a great question, my son," said the meek sage. "It is due to the fact that the Africans live between the dykes (of the Nile)."

"I have many other questions to ask you, but I fear lest you become angry," said the stranger.

Hillel immediately sat down before the stranger, and said: "My son, ask all the questions you have in your mind."

"Are you the Hillel, who is known as the prince of Israel?" asked the stranger.

"I am the one," humbly said Hillel.

"If you are the one, may there not be many like you in Israel," said the aggravated stranger.

"For what reason, my son?" asked Hillel calmly.

"For the reason that I have lost four hundred zuzim because of you," replied the stranger.

"It is worth while that you lose many times that amount, but I shall not get impatient," answered the meek sage.

5. *The Disciples of Hillel*

Hillel had eighty disciples. Thirty of them deserved that the Divine Presence should rest on them as it did upon Moses. Another thirty deserved that the sun should stop for them as it did for Joshua, and the remaining twenty were mediocre. The oldest of them was Jonathan ben Uzziel and the youngest of them was Johanan ben Zakkai.

Jonathan ben Uzziel made a translation of the Prophets. When he completed his work, Palestine quaked over a distance of four hundred miles square. A heavenly voice called out, saying: "Who is the one who has revealed My secrets to mortals?"

Jonathan ben Uzziel then rose to his feet and said: "I am he who has revealed Thy secrets to mankind. It is known to Thee that I have done it neither for the sake of my own glory nor for that of my ancestors, but for the sake of Thine honor, so that no strife exist in Israel."

When Jonathan was about to translate the Hagiographa as well, a heavenly voice called out and said: "Halt! Enough!" The command to desist was given because in the Hagiographa are contained intimations about the Messianic period.

For three years, there was strife between the college established by Shammai and the college founded by Hillel. The students of each school

contended that the laws laid down by them were to prevail. Finally a divine voice proclaimed: "The laws laid down by both are the commands of the Eternal God, but the views of the school of Hillel are to prevail."

"Since the opinions of both are the words of the Eternal God, why then did the Hillelites deserve that their opinion should prevail?" asked some of the sages.

The other sages replied: "The reason is that the disciples of Hillel shunned pride and haughtiness, and they always quoted the opinion of the Shammaites before their own. This is to teach us that the one who humbles himself will be raised by the Lord, and the one who exalts himself, the Lord will humble."

CHAPTER XII

AGRIPPA

1. *The Omen*



AGRIPPA, the grandson of Herod, spent his youth in the court of Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Once Agrippa expressed it as his desire that Cajus, the son of Tiberius, ascend the throne. Some of the courtiers, who were envious of the high esteem in which Agrippa was held at court, slandered Agrippa before the king, saying: "Agrippa is conspiring against you. He has expressed his desire that you, O sire, die, and that your son Cajus ascend the throne."

Tiberius, angered by this report, put Agrippa in chains, and threw him in prison where he was kept for three years. At the end of that time, an owl perched itself on one of the trees in the court of the prison and hooted. In the prison with Agrippa, there was a great wizard. When he heard the hooting of the owl, he turned to Agrippa and said to him: "May your heart be gladdened, young prince, for you shall soon be a free man."

"What makes you say that?" asked Agrippa in astonishment.

"I heard the owl hoot and say: 'The king who has put you in prison will soon die, and another king will succeed him who will free you from this prison,'" said the wizard. "This new king," he continued, "will not only give you your liberty, but he will also put you on the throne in Jerusalem to reign over Judaea."

"Tell me then," said the anxious young prince, "why did the owl hoot so mournfully?"

"Three days before your death," explained the wizard, "this very owl will again appear to you."

Not long after this incident, Agrippa was informed that Tiberius had died and that the young Cajus, a personal friend of Agrippa, had become emperor of Rome. Agrippa was immediately set free. The young emperor put a golden chain on the neck of Agrippa, and said: "Let this chain be on your neck instead of the fetters that my father had put you in."

Cajus sent Agrippa to Jerusalem, commanding the people and the rulers to place Prince Agrippa upon the throne.

2. *Agrippa the Humble*

Agrippa differed from his grandfather Herod in every respect. He was extremely modest and meek, and he was kind to everybody. For this

reason he was greatly beloved of the people. In the performance of the commandments of the Torah, he waived his royal dignity, and considered himself only a humble man.

On the Feast of Weeks, according to law, every Israelite brought to Jerusalem the first ripe fruit. The fruit was brought in person by every one; it was placed in a basket, and carried on the shoulder. Agrippa, on this occasion, would lay aside his crown, and carry the first fruit to the Temple on his shoulder.

One day, King Agrippa was walking through the streets of Jerusalem. He was preceded by many heralds who proclaimed: "Make way, for the king is coming!" Just at that time there came from the opposite direction a bridegroom and his bride, accompanied by a band of music and by many of their relatives and friends, who were returning from the wedding ceremony. The soldiers were about to order that the civil procession turn back to make way for the king. But the humble king said: "Do not disturb their joy. Let them pass by, and I will make way for them to pass."

Once the king said to the high priest: "To-day, I wish to sacrifice one thousand burnt offerings to God. You shall offer no other sacrifices but mine."

While the high priest was engaged in sacrificing the offerings for the king, a poor man came

to the Temple, and said to the high priest: "I have brought here two turtle-doves to be offered to God. Pray, my lord, sacrifice them for me."

"I regret that I cannot do it for you just now, because, by the order of the king, I must sacrifice no other offerings this day but his," said the high priest.

The poor man was very much grieved at the refusal of the high priest, and he said: "My lord, every day I catch four turtle doves. Two doves I always sacrifice to God, and with the other two I support my family. If I fail to bring the sacrifice once, the good Lord will no longer bless me with a good catch of four doves every day. Then I shall remain without means of supporting my poor family."

Moved by the implicit faith of the poor man, the high priest took the two pigeons and offered them up to God.

At night, God appeared to Agrippa in a dream and said to him: "The poor man's offering took precedence over yours." In the morning, the king called for the high priest, and asked him why he failed to carry out the royal order to accept no other sacrifices that day.

"O sire, if you had only seen the pitiful expression on the poor man's face when I refused to accept the offerings from him, you would agree with me that it was impossible to refuse him." The high priest then told the king of all that had happened.

And the king said: "You have done well. Let all the priests learn from you to be kind to the poor."

3. *The Owl Appears Again*

The more humble Agrippa was, the more he endeared himself to his subjects. His great popularity at last began to turn King Agrippa's head, and he sent a great sum of money with an order that very beautiful garments be made for him, the like of which had never been seen before.

After some time, the garments were sent to Agrippa. And very wonderful they were to behold. They were so studded with diamonds and embroidered that they appeared like miniature skies. When Agrippa walked through the streets of Jerusalem clothed in these wonderful garments, the ignorant masses would say: "This is not a mortal king; he is really our god."

The pride of Agrippa grew daily. He refrained from telling the ignorant not to pass such remarks any longer, but remained silent as though giving his silent consent to them. Every day the king would go out arrayed in his beautiful clothes, as if he took delight in hearing himself proclaimed a god.

One day, as Agrippa was walking through the streets of Jerusalem and hearing himself acclaimed a god, the owl he had seen in the prison-yard suddenly appeared. The owl hooted and said: "This god of yours shall die within three days, and his


end will be nothing but dust and worms." As soon as the owl finished hooting these words, it disappeared.

Agrippa remembered the words of the wizard who had been with him in prison and understood the meaning of the owl's hooting. That very day King Agrippa fell seriously ill and died two days later.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

1. *Kamza and Bar Kamza*

N Jerusalem there lived a man who had a friend named Kamza and an enemy named Bar Kamza. Once this man made a banquet, and he ordered his servant to go and invite his friends to the banquet. Among the guests to be invited, his friend Kamza was included. The servant by mistake invited Bar Kamza, his master's enemy, instead of Kamza, his friend.

Bar Kamza came to the banquet. The master of the house was surprised to find his enemy Bar Kamza among the guests, and turning to him, said: "You are my enemy, and what are you doing here? Away with you at once!"

"Since I came," pleaded Bar Kamza, "do not insult me publicly. Permit me to stay here, and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink."

"No, I will not consent to that," insisted the master of the house. "Away with you!"

"I am willing to pay half the cost of the ban-

quet," pleaded Bar Kamza, "but do not insult me and let me stay here."

"I will not consent to that either," said the master of the house.

"Then I will pay you the costs of the whole banquet," pleaded Bar Kamza again.

"Nothing shall avail you," stated the obstinate host, and so saying he seized hold of Bar Kamza and violently led him out of the house.

Smarting from this terrible insult, Bar Kamza thought to himself: "The sages were present when these insults have been heaped upon me, yet they did not interfere. It is evident then that they have been pleased with what had happened. I will therefore take my revenge on all of them."

He accordingly went to Rome, and, gaining admittance into the palace of Nero, he slandered the Israelites, saying: "O sire, the Jews have rebelled against you."

"Where is your proof of that?" asked the Roman emperor.

"O sire, just send an offering to Jerusalem, and order that the high priest offer it for you," said Bar Kamza. "Then you will see that the Jews will refuse to obey your command."

"Go and get a young calf, without blemish, and bring it to the high priest," commanded Nero. "And let us see if my will will be done."

Bar Kamza took the calf, and on the way he made a blemish on the calf so that it became unfit

to be sacrificed. He made a deep cut on the upper lip of the calf. Such a blemish makes the animal unfit for a sacrifice according to the Jewish law, but not according to the Roman usage. When the traitor brought the calf to Jerusalem and told the sages of the wish of the emperor, the sages were about to permit the offering up of the calf, in order not to arouse the fury of the Roman government.

R. Zechariah ben Eucolus, one of the sages, then rose to his feet and protested: "We shall mislead the people by doing this, for they will say that we permitted animals with blemishes to be sacrificed."

The people then wanted to kill Bar Kamza so that he might not go and report to Nero that the Judæans refused to sacrifice his offering. But R. Zechariah ben Eucolus rose to his feet again and interfered, saying: "We shall mislead future generations by this act, for they will think that whoever makes a blemish on sacrifices is punishable with death."

Bar Kamza immediately returned to Rome and informed the emperor that the Jews had refused to sacrifice the lamb he had sent to them. Nero at once proceeded with his army against Jerusalem. When he reached the environs of the Jewish capital city, he decided to find out if he would be successful against the rebels. Like all the people in those days, he believed in signs. He shot an arrow eastward, and the arrow fell toward Jerusalem.

He shot an arrow westward, and it fell toward Jerusalem. He then shot an arrow northward and then southward, and each time it fell toward the direction of Jerusalem.

The Roman emperor saw a little boy pass by, and he said to him: "Recite the Biblical verse that you recently learned in school."

The frightened lad said: "I have recently learned this verse at school: 'And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel.'"

"The Holy One, blessed be He, is desirous to destroy His house," said Nero, "and He wants me to bear the blame, so that I be punished for it." He abandoned his army, ran away and accepted the Jewish faith. From him descended the illustrious scholar Rabbi Meir. Thereupon Vespasian took control of the Roman army, and he laid siege against Jerusalem.

2. *Nakdimon ben Gorion*

During the siege there lived in Jerusalem a very pious and wealthy man, Nakdimon ben Gorion. Before the siege, it once happened that there was a great drought in Jerusalem. Pilgrims from all over the country had come to celebrate a festival in Jerusalem, and there was not sufficient water for the vast masses that had gathered there. The people suffered very much from the drought, and there was no help in sight.

Nakdimon went to one of the Roman officers who dwelt in Jerusalem and said to him: "Permit the people that have gathered in the city to use twelve of your cisterns, and I shall return to you twelve cisterns of water within the next three days."

"But supposing the drought continues for three more days," argued the general, "how will you then repay me for my water?"

"Well," said Nakdimon, "if I am unable to repay you with water, I shall pay a talent of silver for each and every cistern out of which the people drink."

The bargain agreed upon, Nakdimon announced to the much-suffering people that they can go to the premises of the Roman general and drink the water out of twelve of his cisterns. The people were very grateful to the pious Nakdimon for the relief he had brought about to the pilgrims, and mentioned his name with great respect and reverence.

Two days passed, and on the third day, the general rose early in the morning, and anxiously and carefully examined the skies. "There is not a cloud in sight," exclaimed the general with great satisfaction. "Now, Nakdimon will have to pay me with silver and not with water. I shall become wealthy after this."

The happy general waited a few hours, and then he sent a messenger to Nakdimon with the

message: "You can see for yourself, Nakdimon, that there will be no more rain to-day, for there is not a sign of cloud to be seen anywheres. So you might just as well pay me the twelve talents of silver right now."

"I have a great deal of time yet left of the day," sent Nakdimon word back to the general.

At noon, the Roman general again sent a message to Nakdimon, and the latter again sent back the same answer. In the afternoon the general once again sent a message to Nakdimon: "The three days have almost passed. Now you must return to me either twelve cisterns of water, or pay me twelve talents of silver."

"There is still some time left," was the message sent back by Nakdimon.

The general chuckled upon receiving this message, saying: "For a whole year no rain has come down, and now rain will descend from the clear skies in the few minutes of the day that are still left." Certain of his success, the general went to bathe in one of the bath-houses.

While the general was in the bath-house, Nakdimon, with a sad heart, went to the Temple, and he prayed thus: "Master of the world, it is known to Thee that I have done this neither to add glory to myself or to my ancestry. I have done it for the sake of Thy holy Name so that they who came to celebrate Thy festival may not suffer from want of water."

No sooner had Nakdimon concluded his prayer

than heavy clouds covered the heavens and rain descended in such great abundance that it filled all the wells to overflowing. As Nakdimon left the Temple, he met the general who had come out from the bath-house, and the former said to the latter: "Now you will have to pay me for the surplus water you obtained in your wells."

"I well know that your God made the world tremble just for your sake," answered the general. "Nevertheless, an opportunity is still left open to me to claim that you must pay me the twelve talents of silver, for the sun had already gone down, and the water descended after the time limit set by us."

Nakdimon made no reply to the general. He returned to the Temple and again prayed: "Master of the world! Make it known to Thy creatures that Thou hast some people in Thy world whom Thou lovest. As Thou hast performed a miracle for me before, perform another one for me now."

Immediately strong winds dispersed the clouds, and the sun shone in all its brightness. And the disappointed general said to Nakdimon: "Were it not for the fact that the sun came out again, I would have collected the twelve talents of silver from you."

3. The Provisions Destroyed

Now, this very wealthy and pious man, Nakdimon ben Gorion, and two other very wealthy

men, Ben Kalba S'bua, and Ben Tsitsith Hakkeseth, said that they would supply all the inhabitants with the most essential things during the Roman siege. One said that he would supply the whole population with wheat and barley. The second man said that he would supply the whole population with wine, salt and oil. The third man said that he would supply all the inhabitants of the besieged city with wood.

These three wealthy and generous men then opened their storehouses. An inventory was taken of all that was contained in those storehouses, and the people estimated that there were sufficient supplies for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem for a period of twenty-one years.

In Jerusalem there was a war-party who would not yield to the Romans. They insisted that Judæa be freed from the Roman rule and become an independent country once more. But the sages who saw that it was impossible for the Jews to fight the mighty Roman army, said to the leaders of the war-party: "Let us open the gates of the city and make peace with the Romans."

"That cannot be," replied the leaders of the rebels. "We shall never surrender."

Then the leaders of the war-party said to the sages: "Let us open the gates of the city and sally forth to fight the Romans in open war."

"We shall suffer certain defeat," replied the sages. "Why then make such a futile attempt?"

The leaders of the war-party, in their anxiety to go out and fight the Romans, destroyed all the storehouses containing food, including the storehouses of the three wealthy persons. There was then a great scarcity of food in Jerusalem, and the inhabitants suffered the pangs of hunger. The wealthiest people of the besieged city could obtain no food at any price.

Martha, the daughter of Boethus, was the richest woman in Jerusalem. During the siege, when food became scarce, she sent one of her slaves to buy fine flour for her. But by the time he came there, all the fine flour had been sold. He came back and said: "Mistress, there is no more fine flour to be gotten anywheres. But bread baked of fine flour can be obtained."

"Go and get me bread of fine flour," Martha said to the slave.

By the time he got there, the bread of fine flour had been sold. He returned to his mistress and reported: "Mistress, there is no more bread of fine flour to be had, but bread of coarse flour can be bought."

"Go and get me black bread," said Martha.

By the time the slave got there, the black bread too had been sold. He came back to his mistress and said: "There is no more black bread to be gotten; all that there is left is barley flour."

By the time the slave got there, the barley flour too had been sold, and he came back and reported:

"Alas, even the barley flour is gone, and there is nothing else left to be bought."

Martha took off her shoes and said: "I will go out in the street myself, maybe I will be able to get something to eat." On her way to the store, some ordure clung to her feet, and she died.

4. *R. Johanan ben Zakkai*

At that time there lived in Jerusalem a disciple of Hillel, whose name was R. Johanan ben Zakkai. This sage was at the head of the peace-party. He was for making peace with Rome, for he knew that the army of the Jews could not fight the more numerous and powerful Romans.

One day, as R. Johanan walked out into the market-place, he noticed people boiling straw and drinking the water from that. "Alas," exclaimed the grieved Rabbi; "will people who boil straw and drink the water therefrom be able to withstand the attack of the mighty armies of Vespasian? There is no other alternative for me but to leave the besieged city."

Abba Sikra ben Battiah, one of the main leaders of the war-party in Jerusalem, was a nephew of R. Johanan. That day R. Johanan sent word to Abba Sikra: "Pay me a visit secretly."

When Abba Sikra came, R. Johanan said to him: "How long will the terrorists be so obdurate and thus kill all the inhabitants of the city with famine?"

"I am helpless," answered the leader of the rebels; "for should I utter one word in favor of surrender and peace, I would be killed by the leaders of the war party."

"If you are unable to do anything yourself, then find a way for me to get out of the city," pleaded the venerable sage. "Maybe I will be able to bring some salvation to the suffering people."

"We have made up between us," said Abba Sikra, "that no human being can get through the gates of the city, unless he be dead."

"Carry me out then as a dead man," pleaded R. Johanan.

"Pretend that you are sick," said Abba Sikra, "and when everybody will come to visit you, let them put some decayed matter in your bed. The visitors will then proclaim: 'R. Johanan is dead!' Apprise your disciples of your scheme, and let them carry you out of the city. Let no stranger be permitted to carry you, lest they feel that your body is too light for a corpse."

R. Johanan followed the advice of the rebel leader. When the rumor was spread that R. Johanan had died, a few of his disciples carried the coffin containing R. Johanan. They marched all day carrying the coffin, and they reached the gates of the city at sunset. "Who is this?" shouted out the gate-keepers.

"It is a corpse," said the bearers of the coffin. "Are you not familiar with the rule that no dead

person may be left in the city of Jerusalem over night?"

The rebels were about to stab through the body with their spears, but Abba Sikra said to them: "Why arouse the indignation of the people, for they will say: 'The rebels have stabbed their great teacher.'"

The rebels then wanted to thrust him down, but Abba Sikra said to them: "You will arouse the anger of the people, for they will say: 'The rebels have thrust their great master down.'"

The gate-keepers finally opened the gate, and permitted the coffin to be carried out. The disciples carried the coffin until they reached the Roman camp. When they obtained permission to see Vespasian, the general of the Roman army, they opened the lid of the coffin, and out came the living R. Johanan ben Zakkai.

"Peace be unto you, O king! Peace be unto you, O king!" cried out the venerable sage to the Roman general.

"You deserve death twice," said the somewhat surprised and flattered general. "First, because you called me king, and I am no king; second, if I am a king, why did you fail to come to me until now?"

"I am convinced that you are a king, O sire," said R. Johanan; "for had you not been a king, Jerusalem would not have been delivered into your hands. And the reason I have not come to you

till this day is because the war-party would not let me."

Said Vespasian to R. Johanan: "If there is a barrel full of wine, and a serpent is wound around the barrel, would not one break the barrel because of the serpent?"

R. Johanan remained silent. Commenting on this in later times, R. Akiba remarked: "Rabbi Johanan should have replied to Vespasian thus: 'When a serpent is wound around a barrel of wine, we remove the serpent with a pair of tongs, kill it, and we save the barrel of wine.'"

At the very moment R. Johanan was conversing with Vespasian, a herald came to the Roman commander with the following message: "The Roman emperor is no more, and the Senate has appointed you emperor."

Elated over the good news, Vespasian said to R. Johanan: "Your prophecy has come true. Tell me what is your wish, and I shall fulfill it, for I must leave at once and appoint some one else to take charge of the army in my stead."

"My only wish is," said the venerable sage, "that you spare Jabneh and her scholars."

5. *Titus and the Gnat*

Vespasian put his son Titus in full charge of the Roman army. The siege against Jerusalem lasted for three years. At last the city was taken by the Romans, and in spite of the heroic deeds of

the Jews, the Temple was not spared. The Romans, unable to break the walls that surrounded the Temple mount, had to resort to some other means of attack. One of the soldiers cast a burning torch into the Temple, which immediately burst into flames. But Titus ordered that the fire be extinguished.

Titus then entered the Holy of Holies, and blasphemed the Almighty. He spread a Scroll of the Law and desecrated it. With his sword he cut into the curtain of the Ark. A miracle occurred at that moment, and blood bubbled forth, whereupon the haughty Titus laughed and said: "I killed the God of the Jews."

The proud general took the curtain, shaped it like a net, and in it he placed all the vessels of the Temple. He then boarded a vessel to return to Rome with his trophies, but a gale in the sea threatened to drown the vessel. The haughty Titus said: "It would seem that the strength of the God of this people lies only in the waters. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, He drowned in the waters; Sisera, the mighty general, He drowned by means of water, and me too He now desires to drown in the water. If He is a hero, let Him come up to dry land and there engage in battle with me!"

Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard: "O thou wicked son of the wicked, and great-grandson of Esau the wicked! I have an unimportant crea-

ture in my world, and 'gnat' it is called. Go on dry land and engage in combat with it."

When the fleet of Titus touched land, a gnat entered his nose. This small creature bored his brain for seven years, causing him unspeakable pain.

One day Titus happened to pass by the door of a blacksmith. At the sound of the hammer, the gnat became quiet. "Now I have found a remedy for that!" exclaimed Titus. Every day a blacksmith came and continually beat with a hammer to silence the gnat. If the blacksmith was a heathen, Titus would pay him four zuzim per day, but if the blacksmith happened to be a Jew, Titus would pay him nothing for his work, explaining: "You have sufficient reward for your work, when you see your arch-enemy suffer thus." This remedy was effective for only thirty days. After that the gnat became used to the hammering, and did not heed it any longer.

When Titus was about to die, he said: "Burn my corpse, and scatter the ashes of it upon the seven seas, so that the God of the Jews shall be unable to find me and put me on trial for my cruel deeds."

When Titus died, his head was opened, and in the skull was found a gnat as large as a free-bird, the beak of which was of copper and its talons of iron.

6. *God Mourns*

Said R. Jose: "Once as I was walking on the road, I entered one of the ruins in Jerusalem to pray to God. Then Elijah, of blessed memory, came and waited for me at the entrance of the ruin until I got through praying.

"When I finished praying, Elijah said to me: 'Peace be unto you, my teacher.'

"I responded: 'Peace be unto you, my teacher and master.'

"He then said to me: 'My son, why did you enter this ruin?'

" 'I went in there to pray,' I answered.

" 'Then you could have prayed on the road,' said Elijah.

" 'I was afraid lest I be interrupted by the passers-by,' I responded.

"He asked: 'My son, what did you hear while in this ruin?'

" 'I heard a heavenly voice, cooing, in mourning, like a dove, saying: "Woe is Me, I have destroyed My house, burned My Temple, and exiled My children among the nations."'

"Elijah said to me: 'By your life do I swear that the divine voice says this three times daily. Moreover, whenever the Israelites enter their synagogues and say: "Amen, let His great name be blessed for ever and to all eternity," the Holy One blessed be He, shakes His head, and says: "Happy

is the king who is thus praised in his house! What does a father who has exiled his children possess? And woe to the children who were driven away from the table of their father."''"

CHAPTER XIV

RABBAN JOHANAN BEN ZAKKAI

1. *His Greatness*



NE of the youngest disciples of Hillel the Elder was Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai. Like his teacher, he lived to the age of one hundred and twenty years. Forty years of his life he devoted to business, forty to the study of the Law, and forty to teach the Law to others.

The following virtues were recounted of R. Johanan: He never indulged in conversations on worldly matters; he never walked four cubits without engaging in the study of the Law and without having Tefillin on; no one ever preceded him in coming to the house of study, and he was always the last one to leave the house of study; no man ever found him sitting quietly without studying; he permitted none but himself to open the door for his disciples; and he was always the first to greet anybody, even if he met a heathen in the market-place.

One day R. Johanan rode an ass driven from behind by one of his disciples, R. Elazar ben

Arakh. Said the latter to the former: "Master, would you explain me something about the mystic meaning of the divine chariot in the vision of Ezekiel?"

"My son," said R. Johanan, "have I not taught you that such explanation cannot be given to one person, unless such person be a sage who understands it of his own accord?"

"Master, permit me then to recite some of your explanations," said R. Elazar.

R. Johanan at once alighted the ass, wrapped himself in his robe, sat on a stone under an olive tree, and said: "Quote it to me, my son."

"Master, why did you alight from the ass?" asked R. Elazar.

"Is it proper that I should ride an ass," answered R. Johanan, "while you are explaining the divine chariot, and the Divine Presence is with us, and the ministering angels are accompanying us?"

As soon as R. Elazar commenced quoting the mystic explanations of the divine chariot, a fire came down from heaven and lapped all the trees in the field. Then all the trees began to sing praises to God: "Praise the Lord from the earth, ye sea-monsters and all deeps . . . fruit-trees and all cedars . . . praise ye the Lord." Also an angel responded from amidst the fire: "Indeed, this is the explanation of the divine chariot."

R. Johanan rose to his feet, kissed R. Elazar on his head and said: "Praised be the Lord God of

Israel, who gave a son to our father Abraham who is able to understand, fathom and explain the mysteries of the divine chariot. Some people preach well and do not act in conformity with their preaching; some people act well but do not preach in conformity with their acting, but you, my son, preach well, and you act well. Happy are you, O our father Abraham, that Elazar ben Arakh is a descendant of yours."

When this incident was told to R. Joshua, he and R. Jose the priest happened to be on the road. Both travelers said: "Let us also interpret the mysteries of the divine chariot." So R. Joshua began to expound.

That day was one of the bright warm days of Tammuz, but when the exposition was begun by R. Joshua, the heavens were covered with clouds, and a kind of rainbow became visible. Ministering angels began to gather to listen to the exposition, just as mortals assemble to listen to the music at a wedding.

R. Jose the priest thereafter related this incident to R. Johanan ben Zakkai, and the latter said: "Happy are you and happy are the mothers who gave birth to you and R. Joshua. Happy are my eyes that have deserved to see this. In my dream I saw that you and I were together on Mount Sinai, when a heavenly voice said to us: 'Ascend, ascend you hither! Great palaces have been made ready for you, and fine dining couches

have been installed. You, your disciples, and the disciples of your disciples will be admitted to the third rank of righteous men when in paradise.' ”

2. *True Solace*

A very young son of R. Johanan ben Zakkai died, and the disciples of the venerable sage came to comfort him. R. Eliezer was the first to enter, and he said: “Master, would you permit me to say a few words?”

“You may say whatever you please,” said R. Johanan.

“When Adam lost his son Abel, he did not refuse to be comforted for his loss,” said R. Eliezer, “then you, too, should not refuse to be comforted for your bereavement.”

“Does not the grief over my own son suffice me,” said R. Johanan, “that you need mention to me the grief of Adam?”

R. Joshua was the next one to enter, and he said to R. Johanan: “Will you permit me to say a few words?”

“You may say it at your pleasure,” replied the rabbi.

“Job had many sons and daughters and they were all lost to him in one day, and yet he did not refuse to be comforted for them,” said R. Joshua. “Then you, too, master, should not refuse to be comforted.”

“Does not my own grief suffice me,” responded

R. Johanan, "that you need make mention of Job's grief?"

Next R. Jose entered and likewise said: "Master, would you permit me to say something?"

"Certainly," replied the grief-stricken father, "you may say whatever you deem proper."

"Aaron, the high priest," said R. Jose, "had two great sons and both of them died on one and the same day, yet Aaron did not refuse to be comforted. Then you, too, master, should not refuse to be comforted for the loss of your son."

"Is my own grief not sufficient for me," answered R. Johanan, "that you must needs make mention of Aaron's grief?"

Then R. Simeon came in, and he too said: "Would you like me to say aught in your presence?"

"Proceed," answered the grief-stricken sage.

"King David lost a young son," said R. Simeon, "and when the son died, the king did not refuse to be comforted. Then you, too, should not refuse to be comforted."

"Is it not enough that I have my own suffering," replied R. Johanan, "that you need make mention of the suffering of King David?"

Finally, Elazar ben Azariah entered. He sat down in front of the mourner, and he said to him: "Let me tell you a parable: Once a man was given charge of a precious object by the king. Every day this man exclaimed with anxiety: 'Woe is me,

when will I be able to get out of this affair peacefully?" He was very happy when at last he was able to return the charge to the king. You, too, master, were given a son who studied the Law. He then departed from this world and returned to the Almighty without the commission of sin. Should you not feel consoled that you were able to return the object in your charge intact?"

"R. Elazar, my son," said the venerable sage, "you alone consoled me in the proper manner."

3. *Before His Death*

When R. Johanan became ill, his disciples came to visit him. When he saw them enter, he began to weep.

"O master, light of Israel, why are you weeping?" they all asked.

"Why should not I weep?" replied the sage. "If I were brought to be tried before a mortal king, who is here to-day and in the grave to-morrow, whose anger is not an everlasting one, who is unable to bind me in fetters for ever, who is unable to kill me for ever, and who can be appeased with words and bribed with money, yet I would tremble and shed tears. Should not I weep now that I am about to be tried before the Supreme King of kings, the holy One blessed be He, who lives and exists for ever and ever, whose anger is everlasting, who can put me in fetters for ever, who can put me to everlasting death, and who can

neither be appeased with words nor bribed with money?

"Furthermore, there are two ways before me, one which leads to Paradise and another which leads to Hell. Should I, then, not weep when I know not upon which I am to be led?"

"Give us your blessing," pleaded all the disciples.

"May it be the will of God," said the feeble sage, "that you should fear Him just as you fear a mortal."

"O Master, is no more required of us?" asked the disciples in astonishment.

"Would that man feared God so!" said R. Johanan. "For when a man commits a crime, he always takes care that no human eye can see it."

CHAPTER XV

RABBI HANINA BEN DOSA

1. *The Miraculous Bread*



ABBI Haninah was a disciple of R. Johanan ben Zakkai. He was a saintly man and a very profound scholar, but he was extremely poor. Every day a heavenly voice would be heard saying: "The whole world is supplied with food for the sake of Hanina my son, and Hanina my son is satisfied with one small measure of carobs from one Sabbath eve to the other."

All the women that lived in the neighborhood of R. Hanina were accustomed to bake bread on Friday in honor of the Sabbath, but the wife of Hanina could not afford to buy flour wherewith to bake bread for the Sabbath. So she said to herself: "It is disgraceful for us that our neighbors should discover how great is our poverty." So every Friday she would heat the oven with wood. "Let a smoke come out from our chimney," she said, "and my neighbors will think that I, too, bake bread for the Sabbath."

One day one of the inquisitive women neighbors said: "I know that R. Hanina is very poor, and has no money to buy flour with. Why then does a smoke come out of his chimney every Friday? I must go in and find out." So she went and knocked at the door of R. Hanina's house. As she was invited in, the wife of R. Hanina ran out of the kitchen into another chamber, for she was ashamed at the thought that her neighbor would find out that the oven was empty.

But a miracle occurred. The inquisitive neighbor found the oven full of loaves of bread, and the kneading trough full of dough. She called after the wife of Hanina: "Make haste and bring a shovel, because your bread is burning."

"I just went to the other room for that purpose," answered the pious wife of R. Hanina.

2. *Vinegar Instead of Oil*

One Friday, late in the afternoon, R. Hanina noticed that his daughter was very sad, and he inquired, "What may be the cause of your sadness, my daughter?"

"O father," said the daughter, "I intended to put some oil into the candle-stick to be lit in honor of the Sabbath. But by mistake I took the bottle containing vinegar and filled the candle-stick with it. Now I have discovered my mistake, but it is too late to change, for the Sabbath is about to commence."

"Do not worry over this," said the saintly father; "for the One who told the oil to burn and shed light will also tell the vinegar to do so."

The young girl then went and lit the wicks inserted in the vinegar, and sure enough the candle-stick burned all night and all day, until the very close of the Sabbath.

3. *The Golden Leg*

One day, R. Hanina's wife complained to him, "How long shall we continue to suffer thus? Our poverty is beyond description. We have been suffering for many years, and it is about time that we got rid of our troubles."

"What can we do?" inquired the rabbi, somewhat disappointed.

"Pray to God," said the pious wife, "that you be given a part of the goodness that is reserved for the righteous in the future world."

R. Hanina prayed accordingly. No sooner had he finished his prayer than a hand appeared and dropped the gold leg of a table.

That night the rabbi dreamt that all the righteous men in Paradise feasted at gold tables standing on three legs, while he feasted at a table standing only on two legs. The following morning, he said to his wife: "Are you contented that all the righteous should dine at three-legged tables of gold, and we should dine at a gold table with one of its legs missing?"

"Pray then," said the pious wife, "that the gold leg be taken away from you."

He prayed to God that the leg be taken away from him. Thereupon a hand appeared again, snatched up the gold leg and vanished.

4. *The Goats Bring Bears*

One day, a passing stranger left by mistake a few hens at the house of R. Hanina. The rabbi said to his wife: "We must take care of the hens, but we are not permitted to make use of their eggs."

So the hens kept on laying eggs which were allowed to hatch by the wife of the sage. In time the number of the hens increased to such an extent that they became annoying to the sage and his family. He therefore decided to sell the hens, and with the proceeds to purchase some goats.

Once the neighbors complained to R. Johanan and said: "Your goats cause a great deal of damage to us."

"If these goats cause damage to you, let them be devoured by bears," said the rabbi; "but if this be untrue, then let each and every one of them bring a bear on its horns when they return from the pasture."

To the great amazement and delight of the inhabitants of the town, when the goats returned from the field toward evening, each one of them carried a bear on its horns.

Years later, a man came to the house of R. Hanina and said: "Many years ago while passing your house, I left a few hens in your house. Now I demand that you return them to me."

"If you will give some marks of identification," said the rabbi to the stranger, "I will return your hens to you."

The stranger, having satisfied the rabbi that he was the true owner of the hens, was led by the saintly rabbi to a stable. The rabbi, pointing to a large flock of goats, said: "These are the outcome of your few hens. Take all these, for they belong to you."

"How can this be?" asked the stranger in astonishment.

The rabbi then told the stranger how the hens had been changed into goats. The stranger, thanking the pious sage heartily, drove merrily away his big flock of goats.

5. *The Dangerous Lizard*

One day R. Hanina was informed that in a certain field there was a lizard which would come out from its hole and bite the passers-by, causing their death. R. Hanina said to them: "Come, show me where the lizard is."

R. Hanina was led to the place, and when he reached there, he placed his foot on the opening of the hole. Immediately the lizard came up and stung the leg of R. Hanina. This bite, too, caused

death—not of the rabbi, however, but of the lizard itself.

R. Hanina placed the once dangerous lizard on his shoulder and brought it to his college. The people looked at it in astonishment, for they all recognized it as the dangerous lizard which had caused the death of many people. The saintly rabbi said to them: "It is not the lizard that was the cause of death, but sin."

The disciples thereupon said: "Woe to the man that encounters a lizard, and woe to the lizard that encounters R. Hanina."

6. *The Lion. The Rain*

Once, while on the road, R. Hanina noticed a lion running to attack him. The rabbi shouted at the lion: "O you feeble king! Did I not adjure you not to appear in the land of Israel?"

The lion at once took to his heels, but R. Hanina ran after him and said: "Forgive me for insulting you by calling you 'feeble king,' when the **One** who created you called you 'mighty.' "

One day R. Hanina returned home with a basket full of salt on his head. Rain started to come down, and R. Hanina said: "Master of the world! The whole world is at ease, but Hanina is in grief." Thereupon the rain ceased.

When R. Hanina reached his house, he said: "Master of the world! The whole world is in

grief, and Hanina is at ease." Thereupon the rain began to come down again.

7. *The Stolen Ass*

Once thieves stole the ass of R. Hanina. They tied it to a post in their yard, and they put oats in the manger. But the ass would not taste it. Thinking the ass was thirsty, they poured water into the trough, but the ass would not drink it.

The thieves said to one another: "Why keep this ass in our yard until it dies? It will only produce a bad odor." So they opened the gate of the yard, and let the ass get out of there.

Weakened from hunger and thirst, the ass dragged along until it reached the house of its master, R. Hanina. The son of the sage was the first to hear the braying of the ass, and he ran to his father and exclaimed: "Father, I hear the braying of an ass which sounds like that of ours."

"Make haste and open the gate for the animal," ordered the sage, "for it is on the point of dying from hunger and thirst."

The son opened the gate for the ass and placed fodder and water before it. And now the ass no longer refused to eat and to drink.

8. *The Stone Is Conveyed to Jerusalem*

The people of the town where R. Hanina lived, were accustomed to go to Jerusalem very often, and there offer sacrifices or bring there their free-

will offerings. R. Hanina said one day: "Everybody is bringing up something to Jerusalem, and I, being poor, am unable to do anything at all."

Thereupon he went out to the wilderness and there he found a stone which he chipped, chiseled and polished. For he said: "I am going to bring this beautiful stone to Jerusalem." He went out to look for porters to carry the stone to Jerusalem. He met five people, and he said to them: "Will you take this stone for me to Jerusalem?"

"Yes, we will take it there," replied the five men, "providing you pay us fifty *sellas* for our trouble."

As the sage was unable to raise such a large sum of money, he was compelled to decline the offer of the five men. The rabbi was worried, as he was desirous to bring his stone to Jerusalem, but how was he to do it?

God thereupon sent down five angels in the guise of porters, who were met by R. Hanina. The rabbi said to them: "Would you fetch this stone for me to Jerusalem?"

"Give us five *sellas*," they said, "and we shall carry your stone to the place your desire. But one condition we impose upon you, that you yourself should give us a hand in carrying the stone."

Elated at the small price desired by the porters, R. Hanina said: "Yes, I am willing to pay you the five *sellas*, and I will also help you carry it."

The five angels together with R. Hanina raised

the stone, but no sooner had they placed their hands on it than they found themselves, stone and all, in the capital city of Judæa. R. Hanina wanted to pay the men, but when he turned round, he saw that they had vanished. He then entered the Temple and inquired of the priests if they had seen the men who had brought the stone. The priests said to him: "Rabbi, these porters must have been messengers of God. None but angels could have brought this stone here for you."

9. *The Effect of His Prayers*

One day, the son of Rabban Gamaliel fell dangerously sick. The father of the sick boy sent two scholars to R. Hanina with the message: "Please pray to Heaven that my son get well."

As soon as R. Hanina noticed the messengers, he went up to the upper chamber, and prayed for mercy. When he came down, he said to the messengers: "You may return now, for the fever has left him."

"How do you know this, rabbi," inquired the two scholars, "are you a prophet?"

"I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet," replied R. Hanina; "but this I know from experience: If my prayer comes readily to my tongue, I know that it will be accepted, if not, I know that the prayer will not be accepted."

The two scholars then marked the exact time when the fever was supposed to have left the

patient, according to the prediction of R. Hanina. When they came to Rabban Gamaliel and told him of what had occurred in the house of R. Hanina, he said to them: "You stated the time neither too early nor too late. At that very time the fever left my son, and he asked for a drink of water."

At another time it happened that R. Hanina went to study in the college of R. Johanan ben Zakkai. When the son of the master fell sick, the father said: "Hanina my son, pray that my son may live." R. Hanina put his head between his knees and prayed for mercy, and the sick boy recovered from his illness.

Said R. Johanan: "If Hanina had not kept his head between his knees the whole day, he would not have been listened to by Heaven."

Then said the wife of R. Johanan to him: "Is R. Hanina greater than you, that his prayers are accepted?"

"No, he is not greater than I," replied R. Johanan; "but he is like a servant who is constantly in the presence of the king, and can ask for a favor at all times, while I am like an officer who occasionally appears to plead before the king."

10. *The Daughter of N'hunia*

In those days there lived an extremely pious man named N'hunia, who was very poor and therefore unable to help the poor and the needy.

One day he resolved to do something for the benefit of the people. He went and dug wells all along the roads, so that the pilgrims coming up to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals, might have water to drink while on the way.

Once it happened that the daughter of N'hunia fell into the largest well, and no one dared descend into the well to save the girl. The people in their despair ran to R. Hanina and told him of what had happened. They pleaded with the rabbi to advise them what they might do to save the life of the unfortunate girl. "Her moments are numbered," they said, "for the well is very deep, and no one dares go down there to save her."

One hour elapsed, and R. Hanina said to the people: "Have no anxiety over the girl, for she is well." A second hour passed, and he again said to the anxious assembly: "Be not worried over her, for she is well." At the end of the third hour, R. Hanina said to the excited people: "She is saved."

The people then ran back to the well, and sure enough the girl was out of the well safe and sound. And her father N'hunia asked: "My daughter, who brought you up from the well?"

"A ram appeared led by an old man," replied the saved girl, "and they brought me up from there."

The people asked R. Hanina: "How did you know what would happen, are you a prophet?"

"I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet," replied R. Hanina; "I knew that the children of a righteous man could not be harmed by the very thing which the righteous man does in the service of God and his fellow men."

11. *The God of the Jews Appealed for Half a Loaf*

Two disciples of R. Hanina went out one day to the forest to cut wood. A certain astrologer saw these disciples as they went into the forest, and he remarked: "These two men, who enter the forest now, will never come out again."

On the way, the disciples met an old man who said to them: "Pray, have pity on me. I have tasted no food for three days."

The disciples had one loaf of bread between them. They broke off half of their loaf of bread and gave it to the hungry old man. The old man ate the bread, and then said to the two disciples: "Just as you saved my life, so may your lives be saved this day."

The two disciples returned from the forest in peace, and those who had heard the astrologer prophesy, said to him: "Did you not say that these two men will never come back from the forest? Now see them come back hale and hearty."

The astrologer replied: "There is one liar here, whose astrology is false!"

Nevertheless, the people went to investigate the

matter. They examined the bundle of wood carried by one of the disciples, and there they found half of a large snake. They then examined the bundle of wood carried by the other disciple, and there they found the other half of the large snake. The snake had been cut by the disciples unknowingly upon cutting the wood with their saw.

"What good deed did you do to-day, that you deserved to be saved?" asked the people of the two disciples.

The disciples told them of all that had happened. Thereupon the astrologer exclaimed: "What can I do, if the God of the Jews is appeased with half a loaf of bread!"

CHAPTER XVI

RABBAN GAMALIEL

1. *Disputes*



ONCE a philosopher asked R. Gamaliel, who was at the head of the Sanhedrin: "It is told in your Torah that your God will wreak vengeance upon the idol worshippers. Why does He not instead wreak vengeance on the idols themselves?"

R. Gamaliel replied with the following parable: "Once there was a man who had a son whom he loved dearly. One day the father gave his son a little dog to play with. The son liked the dog, and he named the dog after his father. Once while the father was present, the son said: 'I swear by the life of my dog so and so,' mentioning his father's name. At whom should the father have been angry, at the dog or at the son?"

"You compared our gods to a dog," said the philosopher indignantly; "but know you that our gods at times accomplish wonders. For instance, I will relate to you a certain incident that happened only the other day. A fire broke out in our

town. Every house was burned to the very foundation, but the sanctuary of our gods remained intact. Does not this proof that our gods are no dogs?"

R. Gamaliel said: "When the subjects of a king rebel against him, will he fight against the living or against the dead?"

"Granting that our gods are nothing but dogs, and dead ones at that, still why does not your God destroy them all?"

"Our God would then have to destroy the sun, the moon and the stars," replied R. Gamaliel, "for they too are worshiped by the heathens. He would have to destroy all animals, fishes and trees, to whom people bow and worship. Know you then that God allows the world to go on as He has created it, but they who spoil the world will be held accountable."

An infidel once said to R. Gamaliel: "Your God is a thief, for He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and stole one of his ribs."

The rabbi's daughter said: "Pray, father, let me answer him." When she had obtained her father's permission, she said to the infidel: "Please let me have an officer."

"What need have you of an officer?" asked the infidel.

"Last night thieves broke into our house," said the daughter of R. Gamaliel; "they stole a silver

pitcher from our house, and in its place they put a gold pitcher."

"May such thieves come to my house every day," ejaculated the infidel.

"Well, then, did not God do good to Adam by taking from him only one rib and giving him in its stead a wife?" argued the daughter of R. Gamaliel.

"But why did not God do it while Adam was awake?" asked the infidel.

The daughter of R. Gamaliel ordered some meat to be brought to her. She washed the meat and broiled it in the embers of her stove, and then invited the infidel to partake of it. He refused, saying: "It is repulsive to me, for I saw how it lay there in the embers."

"If God would have formed the woman in the presence of Adam," said the daughter of R. Gamaliel, "she too would have been repulsive to him."

One day an infidel said to R. Gamaliel: "If you want me to, I can tell you what your God is doing now."

Before R. Gamaliel made answer to the infidel he uttered a sigh, and the infidel asked: "Why this sighing?"

"My son is overseas," answered the rabbi, "and I have a yearning for him. I wish you would bring him back to me."

"Who knows where he is?" asked the infidel.

"If you do not know what is taking place on earth," said R. Gamaliel, "how can you boast that you know what is happening in heaven?"

At another time the infidel said to R. Gamaliel: "King David says in his Psalms that God counts the stars. What greatness is this? I, too, am able to count the stars in heaven."

R. Gamaliel took some quinces, and put them in a sieve. He shook the quinces, and he said to the infidel: "Count the quinces in the sieve."

"If you stop shaking them, I shall be able to count them," answered the infidel.

"But the stars in heaven do not stand still, either," answered the rabbi; "how then will you be able to count them?"

Once a heathen asked R. Gamaliel: "Tell me the exact place where your God dwells."

"I do not know," answered R. Gamaliel.

"Is this the wisdom you are boasting of?" asked the infidel. "You pray to your God every day, yet you know not where He resides."

"Well, you asked me about God who is distant from us a journey of three thousand five hundred years. But I will ask you to point out to me the place of something which is with you day and night."

"Pray ask me," said the curious heathen.

"Tell me then the exact place where your soul is," said the rabbi.

"I do not know the exact place of my soul," answered the infidel.

"The place of your soul which is with you day and night you do not know, yet you ask me to point out to you the place of our God who is distant from us a journey of three thousand five hundred years."

"Nevertheless, we are wiser than you are," said the infidel; "for we pray to something that we can see at all times, and you pray to something you are unable to see."

"True you can see the gods you pray to, but they are unable to see you," replied the sage; "but the Holy One, blessed be His name, is able to see all His creatures, but His creatures are unable to see Him. For it is written: 'For no man can see Me and yet remain alive.'"

The Roman emperor once asked R. Gamaliel: "You assert that wherever ten Jews assemble, there the Divine Presence is also present. Tell me, then, how many Gods have you?"

R. Gamaliel called over his attendant and slapped him on the neck. "Why did you do that?" asked the emperor.

"I slapped him because he is audacious," answered R. Gamaliel; "he permitted the rays of

the sun to enter his house, yea the very same rays that shed light in your palace, O sire."

"But the sun shines for every living creature," said the emperor.

"O sire," said R. Gamaliel, "the sun is but one of the many myriads of heavenly bodies that do the will of God. Yet it shines everywhere. How much more is this true of The Holy One, blessed be His name, who is the Creator of the sun and all else."

2. *The Candle-stick and the Ass*

Once R. Gamaliel was told that there was a certain judge in his neighborhood who never took any bribe. R. Gamaliel then said: "I am going to find out for myself if there is any one who refuses to take a bribe." He went to his sister Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, and said to her: "Sister, go to our neighbor the judge and make claim against me that I refuse to give you a share in the estate left by our father, and give him a gold candle-stick."

Imma Shalom accordingly went to the judge, gave him the gold candle-stick, and complained: "My brother Gamaliel would not give me a share in the inheritance left by our father."

He summoned R. Gamaliel and said to him: "Why do you refuse to give her a share in your father's property?"

"Because in our Torah is written that a daughter is not entitled to any part of the inheritance where there are sons," answered R. Gamaliel.

"But from the time you were driven out of your land," answered the judge, "the Law of Moses was taken away from you and another law was given, and in that law it is written that a daughter and a son have equal rights."

On the following day R. Gamaliel brought a Lybian ass and presented it to the judge. Thereupon the judge summoned Imma Shalom again and said: "I looked very carefully into the matter, and I find a passage in the new law which reads: 'I came not to diminish from the Law of Moses, but I came to add to it,' and in the Law of Moses it is provided that a daughter is not entitled to any share of the inheritance where there are sons."

Imma Shalom, desirous to hint to the judge of the bribe she had given him the day before, remarked: "May your light be as brilliant as that of the candle."

"But the Lybian ass has come and kicked the candle-stick away," remarked R. Gamaliel.

3. *R. Gamaliel Removed from the Presidency*

R. Gamaliel, as President of the Sanhedrin, would ascertain the beginning of the new moons in order to determine when the Festivals were to be celebrated. Once R. Gamaliel fixed a certain

day of the week for the Day of Atonement, and R. Joshua, according to his calculations, fixed another day as the Day of Atonement. So R. Gamaliel sent a message to R. Joshua: "I command that you yield to my opinion, and therefore I order you to come to me with your staff and with your purse on the day which you fixed as the Day of Atonement."

R. Joshua obeyed the mandate of the President of the Sanhedrin, and he came to Jabneh to see R. Gamaliel on the day which was supposed to be the Day of Atonement according to his calculation. As soon as R. Gamaliel noticed R. Joshua enter, he rose from his seat at the head of the table, and kissed R. Joshua on the head, adding: "Enter in peace. You are welcome, my teacher and my pupil. You are my teacher as far as learning is concerned, but you are my disciple, because of the fact that you listened to my decree. Happy is the generation in which the great are obedient to the mediocre."

One day R. Zadok asked a certain question of law, and R. Joshua decided it in contradiction to the view of R. Gamaliel. R. Gamaliel said to R. Joshua: "Remain standing on your feet, until evidence is brought against you that you dared contradict me."

R. Joshua rose to his feet, and said: "What defense can I have? If I were alive and the one who complained against me were dead, then the

living would be able to deny the dead. Now that he is alive and I am alive, how can one deny the other?"

So R. Gamaliel continued to expound the law, and R. Joshua remained standing. The people, indignant at the insults heaped upon R. Joshua, told the president to cease lecturing. The latter desisted, and R. Joshua took a seat.

A similar incident occurred a second time, when again there arose a controversy between the president of the college and R. Joshua, as to the decision of a certain point at law. The people after this incident said: "How long will R. Gamaliel keep on tormenting R. Joshua? Let us elect some one else to the presidency of the college."

After due consideration, they decided to elect as president R. Elazar Ben Azariah. They accordingly sent a delegation to the rabbi, who asked him: "Would you consent to become the head of the college?"

"Before I give you my decision," said R. Elazar, "I must consult my family."

R. Elazar went home and consulted his wife as to whether he should accept the nomination or not. His wife said: "Do not accept it, because they may force you to resign soon after."

"What of that?" said the rabbi. "You know what people say: 'Let one make use of a very expensive glass utensil, be it only for one day, and as for the morrow, let it break.'"

"But your age is against you," argued his wife.

That day R. Elazar was only eighteen years old. To show that the newly-elected president was worthy of that office, a miracle occurred. Eighteen rows of gray hair appeared in his beard, and he thus gained the respect of the disciples at the college.

When R. Gamaliel was president of the college, he announced: "He whose inside is not as his outside, that is one who is insincere, should not enter the college." On the day R. Elazar succeeded R. Gamaliel to the presidency, the gate-keeper was removed, and every one was permitted to enter. As a result many students flocked to the college, and many seats had to be added to accommodate them.

Noticing the great increase of students, R. Gamaliel grew dejected, for he said: "It is likely, God forbid, that I, with my strict discipline, prevented the study of the Torah among Israel."

But the next night white pitchers filled with ashes were shown R. Gamaliel in his dream. This was to show the dejected rabbi, that the new students were not of the desirable type, as they were insincere.

4. *R. Gamaliel Reinstated*

Although R. Gamaliel was removed from his high office, he did not stay away from college. The very same day he went to college and took

part in the legal discussions there. A dispute had arisen with regard to the interpretation of some Biblical law, and the view of R. Gamaliel was again opposed by R. Joshua. After some argument, R. Joshua succeeded in proving to the satisfaction of the members of the college that his view was the correct one.

R. Gamaliel then said: "I must go to the house of Joshua, and ask his pardon."

When R. Gamaliel reached the humble house of R. Joshua, he noticed that the walls of the house were black as if covered with soot. R. Gamaliel remarked to R. Joshua: "By the walls of your house one can see, that you are a smith."

"Woe to the generation whose leader you are!" exclaimed R. Joshua; "and woe to the ship whose helmsman you are! For you know nothing of the trouble of the scholars,—how they support themselves and what they live on."

"I yield to you," said R. Gamaliel, "pray forgive me."

But R. Joshua paid no heed to the plea of his visitor.

"Do it for the sake of my ancestors," pleaded the deposed leader of the Jews.

This plea R. Joshua could not let go by unheeded, and he pardoned R. Gamaliel.

People then said: "Who would go and notify the scholars that a reconciliation has taken place between R. Gamaliel and R. Joshua?"

A certain cleaner said: "I will go and inform them."

R. Joshua was about to send a message with the cleaner to the scholars at college, but R. Akiba said to him: "The scholars have locked the doors, so that the servants of R. Gamaliel do not enter the college and trouble them."

Then R. Joshua said: "I will go myself and inform them."

R. Gamaliel was thereupon reinstated to his presidency by the members of the college, but R. Elazar continued in office for some time.

5. *An Office Is Servitude*

Once R. Gamaliel and R. Joshua embarked upon a voyage. When at midseas, R. Gamaliel said that his provisions consisted of bread of coarse flour, while R. Joshua was provided with bread of coarse flour and in addition some fine flour, out of which he intended to bake bread aboard the ship.

The voyage took longer than they expected, and R. Gamaliel, having consumed his bread of coarse flour, was compelled to partake of R. Joshua's bread of fine flour, which the latter had meanwhile baked.

"What is the reason you took the flour along?" asked R. Gamaliel. "Did you know that the voyage would take longer than usual?"

"Yes, I did," replied R. Joshua.

"How did you know it?" inquired R. Gamaliel.

"There is a certain comet which appears once in seventy years, and it leads the sailors astray. I thought it would appear now, and lead us astray."

"You possess so much knowledge," said R. Gamaliel, "yet you have to embark upon a voyage in order to find some means of earning a livelihood."

"Why marvel at me?" asked R. Joshua. "Rather marvel at the two of your disciples who are on dry land. They are R. Johanan ben Gudgada and R. Elazar ben Hisma, who are able to figure out how many drops of water the sea contains—yet they have no bread to eat, and no clothes to put on."

When R. Gamaliel returned from his voyage, he sent for the two disciples that had been mentioned to him by R. Joshua, telling them that he intended to give them some office. But these two scholars were humble and therefore refused to come at the invitation of R. Gamaliel. But the president of the college sent again for them, and this time they came.

"Why did you refuse to come?" asked R. Gamaliel. "By appointing you to an office, you seem to believe that I place you in a position of rulership, and therefore you decline it. On the contrary, by conferring an office upon you, I place you in a position of servitude."

6. *R. Gamaliel as Waiter*

The son of R. Gamaliel once made a banquet, and among the invited guests were R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, and R. Zadok. R. Gamaliel acted as host, and he served the guests with drinks. He handed the cup to R. Eliezer, but the latter refused to take it out of respect for the former. Then R. Gamaliel offered a cup to R. Joshua, and the latter accepted it.

Thereupon R. Eliezer said: "What is this, Joshua? Shall we sit at the table, while the president of the college waits upon us?"

"A man greater than R. Gamaliel once acted as waiter," answered R. Joshua.

"And pray, who was that?" asked R. Eliezer.

"Our father Abraham was the greatest man of his time," responded R. Joshua, "yet he served upon the three visitors who had come to his house. Perhaps you wish to tell me that they appeared to him as ministering angels? No, they appeared to him only in the guise of Arabs. Should not then R. Gamaliel act as host and wait upon us?"

Thereupon R. Zadok remarked: "How long will you disregard the glory of God, and concern yourselves with the honor of mortals? The Holy One, blessed be He, causes the winds to blow, the clouds to rise, the rain to fall, and the ground to bring forth food for His creatures. If the Almighty serves His lowly creatures, should not R. Gamaliel condescend to serve us?"

CHAPTER XVII

RABBI ELIEZER BEN HYRCANUS

1. *His Craving for Wisdom*



IN Jerusalem there lived at that time a man whose name was Hyrcanus. He was very wealthy, and possessed many fields and vineyards. He had many sons who were faithful workers in the field, and who never cared for knowledge. One of the sons of Hyrcanus was a youth named Eliezer. Until the age of twenty-two, the youthful Eliezer did not get an opportunity to study the Torah.

One day all the sons of Hyrcanus were working in the field, Eliezer plowing in a rugged field, and his brothers in level fields. Eliezer, letting the oxen stand idle, sat down somewhere in the field and wept. His father Hyrcanus, who happened to pass by, inquired: "My son, what is the cause of your tears? Perhaps you are grieved because your brothers plow in level fields, and you in a rugged field? From now on you will work in level fields only."

Eliezer made no reply to his father's inquiries,

and returned to his work. On the following day he was assigned to work in a level field. But there, too, the young Eliezer, leaving his oxen, sat down and wept.

"What is the cause of your tears now?" inquired the surprised father. "Maybe you prefer to plow in a rugged field?"

"No, I do not, father," replied Eliezer.

"Why, then, do you weep?" asked the father rather amazed.

"I desire to study the Torah," replied the weeping son.

"Now, at the age of twenty-two, you desire to study the Law?" retorted the father. "You had better get married, and you will have an opportunity to take your children to school to study."

One day, Eliezer said to his father: "I want to go to R. Johanan ben Zakkai to study at his college."

"You will taste no food, before you plow a full-sized furrow," said the father.

The following day, Eliezer rose in the morning, and plowed a full-sized furrow. At the end of the furrow, the ox employed by Eliezer fell and broke its leg. The youthful Eliezer said: "It was to my advantage that the ox broke one of its legs."

He left the ox in the field, and ran away from his home to the college of R. Johanan ben Zakkai in Jerusalem. That day was a Friday, and Eliezer walked about for twenty-six hours without

food, from four o'clock in the afternoon on Friday to six o'clock in the afternoon of Saturday.

Eliezer came to the college of R. Johanan ben Zakkai, took a seat, and wept. The president of the college noticing the youthful stranger weeping, said: "Why are you weeping, my son?"

"I long to study the Law of God," replied Eliezer.

"Have you ever studied anything at all?" inquired R. Johanan.

"I have never studied anything at all," answered Eliezer.

Thereupon R. Johanan daily taught Eliezer the reading of the Shema, the prayers, grace after meals, and two laws. On the Sabbath, Eliezer would go over what he had learned during the week and commit it to memory. For eight days Eliezer kept on studying without tasting food, and on that day a foul breath came out of his mouth, and reached the nostrils of R. Johanan. Thereupon R. Johanan said to him: "Eliezer, did you taste any food to-day?"

There was no answer.

"Eliezer, did you taste any food to-day?" inquired the rabbi again.

There was no answer.

"I swear by your life," declared the rabbi, "that to-day you must eat bread with me."

"I already ate at my inn," replied the hungry Eliezer.



The head of the college inquired: "Why are you weeping, my son?"

Turning to his disciples, R. Johanan said: "By your lives I swear that you must immediately investigate this matter."

The scholars went to each and every inn in Jerusalem and inquired if there was a youthful scholar stopping there, and everywhere they were informed that there was no such scholar staying there. Finally they came to the house of a poor woman, and she told them that a youthful scholar had been lodging at her house for the last eight days.

"Does this scholar have anything here?" inquired the students.

"He has nothing here," replied the poor hostess; "all he has in my house is a sack filled with something."

"Pray show us that sack," begged the scholars.

The woman thereupon brought the sack to the scholars. They opened it and found it full of earth. Then they inquired of the woman: "Did he eat anything in your house to-day?"

"No, he ate nothing to-day," replied the woman. "Why he has not eaten anything with me since he came here, and I thought that he ate at the table of the rabbi."

The students reported their investigation to R. Johanan, who said: "Alas, Eliezer, that you had to rely upon us, for we neglected you. But, instead of the bad odor proceeding from your mouth, may great wisdom proceed from it which should be

known and famed from one end of the world to the other."

R. Johanan assigned medicines and food for Eliezer, who soon recovered.

2. *His Greatness*

Three years passed since Eliezer had left his family. His brothers then said to Hyrcanus their father: 'See what Eliezer has done to you. He has abandoned you at your old age and gone to Jerusalem. Go to the sages in Jerusalem, and make a vow there that your son Eliezer shall derive no benefit from your property.'

So Hyrcanus went up to Jerusalem to consult the sages about disinheriting his son.

The day on which Hyrcanus arrived in Jerusalem was a sort of a festival day with the president R. Johanan. All the great men of the country were invited to that celebration. When R. Johanan was informed that Hyrcanus, the father of the young Eliezer, had arrived, he ordered that a seat be provided for him at the table. The scholars gave Hyrcanus a seat among the great men of the land. Hyrcanus took his seat among the great men and trembled with fear, for he wondered why such glory had been allotted him.

During the feast, R. Johanan said to the young Eliezer: "Give us a lecture on some topic."

"Master, I am unable to lecture," said the young Eliezer. "As a cistern cannot give more water than it receives, so I am unable to give any more of the Law than I received from you."

"My son," said R. Johanan, "you are like a spring from which water flows of its own accord."

Eliezer finally yielded to the urgent requests of R. Johanan and the other disciples, and commenced to lecture on topics the like of which no human ear had ever heard before. His countenance radiated a light equal to that of the sun, even equalling the rays of the light that had been shed by the countenance of Moses. The light was so strong, that no one could tell whether it was day or night.

R. Johanan, enchanted by the wisdom of his young disciple, rose to his feet, kissed Eliezer on the head, and said: "Happy are you, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that this one is one of your descendants."

"Of whom did R. Johanan say this?" inquired Hyrcanus.

"He said it of your son Eliezer," came the reply.

"He should not have said it thus, then," protested the father. "He should have said: 'Happy is Hyrcanus, who has a son like this one.'"

Hyrcanus then rose to his feet and said in the presence of those assembled: "Verily, I have come here for the purpose of disinheriting my son Elie-

zer. Now, I will give all my property to my son Eliezer, and the rest of my sons will have no share in it."

"Father," said Eliezer, "if I had wanted to possess lands, I would have prayed to the Almighty for it; if I had wanted silver and gold, I would have prayed to the Almighty for it; for He is the possessor of everything; but all I prayed for was wisdom and knowledge. Pray do not deprive my brothers of their just portions."

3. *The Great Controversy*

Later on R. Eliezer became the head of a college where thousands of students received instructions. The college hall was shaped like an arena, an oblong with seats on both sides. In the center there was a stone upon which R. Eliezer was wont to sit and expound the law.

One day R. Joshua visited the college hall. This great sage kissed the stone and said: "This stone is like to Mount Sinai, upon which the Torah had been given, and the one who sits on it is like to the Ark of the Covenant in which the Torah was placed."

When R. Johanan died and Gamaliel became president of the college, there arose many controversies among the heads of the various houses of learning, regarding the decision of some points at law. R. Gamaliel, as the head of the Sanhedrin, decided once for all to have peace in the House of

Israel, and he therefore forced every scholar to yield to the laws as laid down by the Sanhedrin. But many refused to obey this mandate, and R. Gamaliel was compelled, in many instances, to resort to the ban of excommunication. One of these who was thus punished, was no other than the famous R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who now was the brother-in-law of Gamaliel, the former having married the latter's sister.

And this is how it came about. Once a question arose among the great scholars of the age as to the decision of a certain point at law. R. Eliezer, single-handed, opposed the view of the rest of the sages. He advanced all kinds of arguments to prove that his view was the right one, but these arguments were rejected by the sages.

R. Eliezer, seeing that all his arguments were futile, said: "Let the carob-tree, standing near the college, prove that my opinion is the prevailing one."

No sooner had R. Eliezer finished his words than the carob-tree jumped one hundred cubits, roots and all. But the sages said: "No proof can be cited from a carob-tree."

"Then let this brook prove that I am right," exclaimed R. Eliezer.

No sooner had R. Eliezer completed his words than the water in the brook reversed its course. But the sages said: "No proof can be cited from a brook."

"Then," said R. Eliezer, "let the walls of this college prove that I am right."

The walls of the college hall bowed, threatening to fall. R. Joshua rebuked them and said: "If scholars endeavor to defeat one another in discussion, why should you interfere?"

The walls did not collapse out of respect for Joshua, and did not return to their erect position out of respect for R. Eliezer, and so they stand leaning to this day.

"Let then proof come from heaven that my view is the right one," said R. Eliezer.

Immediately a heavenly voice was heard: "Why do ye contradict R. Eliezer? His opinion is always right."

R. Joshua rose to his feet and said: "The Torah is no longer in heaven. We pay no attention to a heavenly voice, for Thou hast long ago written in Thy Torah, given on Mount Sinai: 'Turn after the majority.'"

R. Nathan afterwards met the Prophet Elijah, and he said to him: "What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do at that moment?"

Elijah replied: "God smiled and said: 'My children have won over Me! My children have won over Me.'"

4. *R. Eliezer Excommunicated*

R. Eliezer refused to yield to the opinion of the majority and to the authority of the Sanhedrin,

presided over by his brother-in-law R. Gamaliel. To preserve peace and harmony in Israel, R. Gamaliel excommunicated R. Eliezer.

R. Eliezer was not present when the ban was put upon him, and the question arose among the scholars as to who should go and notify the great scholar of his doom. R. Akiba said: "I will go and notify him, for should an unworthy person go and notify him, R. Eliezer is apt to fly into a rage and cause the destruction of the entire world."

R. Akiba accordingly arrayed himself in black garments, wrapped himself in a black cloak, and, as he came into the presence of R. Eliezer, he seated himself at a distance of four cubits.

Thereupon R. Eliezer asked: "Akiba, why is this day different from all other days?"

R. Akiba sorrowfully replied: "Master, it seems to me that your colleagues hold themselves aloof from you."

R. Eliezer, realizing that he was excommunicated, rent his garments, took off his sandals and sat down on the ground. His eyes shed tears, and the world was punished by losing one-third of its olives, one-third of its wheat, and one-third of its barley. Even the dough that was in the hand of a woman was spoiled. That day was a day of calamity, for a fire came forth from the eyes of R. Eliezer, and wherever he cast his glance, the place was reduced to ashes.

On that day R. Gamaliel happened to embark on a vessel, and a gale arose threatening to drown him. R. Gamaliel said: "This must be because of the ban placed upon R. Eliezer."

R. Gamaliel thereupon rose to his feet and said: "Master of the world! It is known to Thee that I have done this not because of my own glory or that of my ancestors, but that I have done it for the sake of Thine honor, so that no dissensions shall arise in Israel."

No sooner had R. Gamaliel finished his prayer than the rage of the sea abated.

Imma Shalom, the wife of R. Eliezer and the sister of R. Gamaliel, would not from that day on permit her husband to incline his head when saying the Propitiatory Prayers.

One day a poor man stood at the door of R. Eliezer's house asking for alms. Imma Shalom brought out some bread for the poor man, and when she returned she found her husband prostrating himself in prayer. She shuddered at the sight and said to R. Eliezer: "Arise, for you already caused the death of my brother Gamaliel."

That very moment word came from the house of R. Gamaliel notifying the people that he had died. So R. Eliezer inquired of his wife: "How did you know before hand that death would come to your brother?"

"I have learned at my father's house," answered the pious woman, "that all the gates of heaven are

closed, except the one designated to receive the tears of those whose feelings are wounded."

5. *The Ban Lifted*

One day when R. Eliezer became sick, his disciples came to visit him. R. Eliezer remarked to them: "The Almighty became wroth with me, and he punished me with suffering."

All the disciples wept upon hearing this from the great teacher, but R. Akiba smiled. "Why are you smiling, Akiba?" they all inquired in astonishment.

"Why are you crying?" asked R. Akiba of them.

"Is it possible for one to see a Scroll of the Law in trouble," said the disciples, "and shed no tears?"

"And I smile for this reason," said R. Akiba. "When I saw that our great master was always successful: his wine never became sour, his flax was never blasted, his oil never produced an ill odor, and his honey never fermented, I thought: 'Perhaps, God forbid, my master is receiving his reward in this world and has forfeited his share in the world to come.' But now that I see my master suffering pain, I am happy."

"Why, Akiba, what made you think thus?" asked R. Eliezer. "Is there any precept in the whole Torah I failed to carry out?"

"But, master," said R. Akiba, "you taught us: 'For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.'"

On another occasion four sages came to visit the ill R. Eliezer. They were: R. Tarfon, R. Joshua, R. Elazar ben Azariah, and R. Akiba. R. Tarfon said: "Master, you are more beneficial to Israel than the very rain, because rain brings only good to those who dwell in this world, and you bring good both to the dwellers in this world and to those in the world to come."

R. Joshua said: "You are more beneficial to Israel than the sun, because the sun brings good only to those who dwell in this world, but you bring good both to those who are in this world and to those who are in the next world."

R. Elazar ben Azariah said: "You are better for Israel than a father or mother, because parents are good for this world only, but you are good for both this world and the world to come."

R. Akiba said: "Suffering is precious and welcome."

R. Eliezer then said to his disciples: "Support me so that I can sit in an erect position and listen to the explanation of my disciple Akiba who said that suffering is precious and welcome." Then turning to his disciple, he said: "Akiba, whence do you infer this?"

"I infer this from Manasseh, king of Israel," said R. Akiba. "Is it likely that King Ezekiah, who taught the Law of God to all Israel, neglected to instruct his own son Manasseh? But all the efforts made by this very pious father were futile

and Manasseh was very sinful. And when did that wicked king first improve and think of the God of his fathers? Only when he felt the pain of suffering. From this I infer that suffering is welcome and precious."

At some other time, R. Akiba and his colleagues came to visit the sick R. Eliezer, and they sat down at a distance of four cubits from him.

"Wherefore have you come?" asked the aged rabbi.

"We have come to learn something from our master," they replied.

"Why have you failed to come until now?" asked R. Eliezer.

"Because we were very much occupied and had no spare time," replied the pupils.

"I wonder if you will all die a natural death," said the ill rabbi.

"And what is my fate?" inquired R. Akiba.

"Your end shall be more tragic than theirs," answered R. Eliezer.

R. Eliezer then placed his arms on his chest, and said: "Woe to you, my arms, which are like two Scrolls of the Law which are not unfolded: much of my learning is buried with me, because I was prevented from teaching. Much of the Torah have I studied, and much of it have I taught. Much of the Torah have I studied, yet I carried away from the knowledge of my teachers no more than a dog takes who licks out of the

sea. Much of the Torah have I taught, yet my pupils have carried away from my knowledge no more than clings to a stick that is inserted in a tube of paint. I have studied many laws on various subjects, and I was prevented from imparting them to my disciples."

On that very day, the disciples asked of R. Eliezer many questions of law, and he answered them all. And just as he finished rendering the last decision, his soul departed. Thereupon R. Joshua rose to his feet and exclaimed: "The ban is lifted! The ban is lifted."

CHAPTER XVIII

RABBI JOSHUA BEN HANANIA

1. *Wine in Earthen Vessels*



RABBI Joshua was one of the five distinguished disciples of R. Johanan ben Zakkai. He was noted and beloved by the people not only for his great learning and deep knowledge, but also for his fine character. He was very modest, amiable and peace-loving. On account of his greatness he was a frequent visitor at the palace of the Roman emperor, who very often would enter into discussions with him on various topics.

When he was still an infant in the cradle, the mother of R. Joshua would take him near the house of study. When she was asked why she did that, she replied: "Let his ears become accustomed to listen to the words of the Torah."

Although R. Joshua was very modest, he once said of himself: "If all the seas were ink, and all reeds pens, and the heavens and earth parchment, and all people scribes, they would not suffice to write down all that I have studied. Yet I have barely skimmed the Torah."

One day, while R. Joshua was visiting the palace of the Roman emperor, the emperor's daughter said to the rabbi: "Oh, that glorious wisdom should dwell in such an ugly vessel!"

R. Joshua made no reply to the remark of the princess. After some time had passed, R. Joshua said to the princess: "My daughter, what vessels does your father, the king, hold his wine in?"

"He keeps it in earthen vessels," replied the princess.

"Should your father who is the mighty emperor of Rome, keep his wine in earthen vessels like common men?" asked Joshua.

"In what then should the king keep his wine?" inquired the princess.

"Kings should keep their wine in gold and silver vessels," replied the rabbi.

The princess asked her father to put the wine in gold and silver vessels. After a short time the wine turned sour, and the emperor said to his daughter: "Who advised you to do it?"

"R. Joshua told me to do it," replied the princess.

R. Joshua was at once summoned before the Roman emperor, who inquired: "Why did you advise the princess to put the wine in gold and silver vessels?"

"She said of me, 'Oh, that glorious wisdom should dwell in such an ugly vessel!' So I con-

vinced her that good wine is kept in an earthen vessel."

"Nevertheless," said the king, "there are many learned men who are of fair appearance."

"If they were of ugly appearance their knowledge would be greater," replied R. Joshua.

2. *The Thief in the Attic*

One day a wayfarer visited the house of R. Joshua. The sage received the stranger very kindly. He gave him to eat and drink, and then led him to a room in the attic where he was to sleep. When the stranger was already up in the attic, R. Joshua removed the ladder from there, so that the stranger should not be able to come down.

In the dark of night, when every one in the house of R. Joshua was fast asleep, the stranger packed up whatever he could find in the attic in a big sheet. Putting the big bundle of the stolen goods on his shoulder, he stepped over to the opening where the ladder had stood, and wanted to go down. The thief did not notice the absence of the ladder, for it was very dark, and down he fell to the ground with a mighty thump. The thief was very much hurt by the fall, and he was unable to rise from the ground.

In the morning, R. Joshua stepped out of the house, and found the stranger prostrated on the ground with a bundle of clothes alongside of

him. "Villain," said R. Joshua, "does a sensible man act thus?"

"Rabbi," said the stranger, "I did not know that you would remove the ladder from underneath me."

"Villain," said R. Joshua, "did you not notice that you aroused my suspicion even last night?"

3. *The Pious Man of Ashkelon*

One day R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and R. Joshua ben Hanania went up to Jerusalem to celebrate a festival. While in the Temple, the two sages noticed an angel carrying a white robe which was as brilliant as the very sun.

"For which of us is this robe intended?" asked the sages of the angel.

"This robe is intended not for you," said the angel, "but for Joseph the gardener that dwells in Ashkelon."

The two sages examined the robe closely, and they noticed that it lacked a border.

The festival over, the two sages went to Ashkelon, to become acquainted with Joseph the gardener. On arriving there, the people of the town gave the two sages a great ovation, and one townsman vied with the other for the honor of having the sages sojourn in his house. But the two sages said: "Thanks for your hospitality; we desire to stay over night in the house of Joseph the gardener."

The people were not a little surprised upon hearing the wish of the sages, but they knew that their will could not be swayed.

Arriving near the house of the gardener, the sages found him picking herbs in the field. They asked: "Will you permit us to stay in your house over night?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," answered the gardener, utterly astonished at the sight of the two sages. "But I am very sorry, for all I have home is two loaves of bread and nothing else."

"That will suffice for all of us," said the two sages, "let it not trouble you."

The meal over, the two sages asked: "Tell us, good man, what is your occupation?"

"I take care of my garden from morning till evening," said the humble gardener, "and besides this I do nothing else."

"But what good have you ever done in your life," asked the sages, "that you deserve such a wonderful robe?"

"Pray, tell me what you mean?" asked the gardener in surprise. "I know not what you refer to."

The sages then told Joseph what they had seen in the Temple, and Joseph remarked: "I surely did not deserve such a distinction, and if it was God's will that I have such a robe, it was simply because He is merciful to His creatures and bestows His bounty upon them even when they do not deserve it."

"We admire your modesty," said the sages, "but you must tell us what good deed you have ever done to deserve such an honor."

"Well, I must not refuse you," said the embarrassed gardener, in the presence of his wife, "and I must tell you the truth, since you insist. Half of the vegetables I daily pick in my garden I distribute secretly among the poor of the town. But please do not disclose it to anybody."

"Was the robe perfect in every respect?" asked the good wife of Joseph the gardener.

"It was perfect in every detail," said the sages, "save that it lacked a border."

When the sages took leave of Joseph and his wife, the pious woman said to her husband: "Let us give more charity to the poor, so that your robe may be supplied with the missing border."

"How can we do that," said the gardener, "when we are so poor?"

"Then I will hire myself out as a servant," said the pious woman, "and the wages I receive we shall distribute among the poor."

The pious wife of Joseph hired herself out, and she gave the money she earned to the poor of the town. God was very much pleased with the kindness of the good couple, and He sent down an angel from heaven to the humble house of Joseph the gardener. Upon appearing in the house of Joseph, the angel said: "Joseph, know thou that thy robe is now complete, and it shall

lack nothing. But as for thy good wife, there shall be prepared for her a robe many times more beautiful than yours. Now, go with your good wife to such and such a place, and there you will find a hidden treasure. From now on you shall be able to continue your charitable work in wealth instead of poverty."

Joseph and his wife went to the place pointed out by the angel, and they unearthed a treasure. They became very rich, but they continued to be humble and to distribute alms among the poor, without anybody knowing it.

4. *R. Joshua and the Witch*

One day R. Eliezer and R. Joshua travelled through Assyria. Upon arriving at a certain town, the sages noticed children playing in the street. They made little sand piles, and one of the children set one pile aside and said: "This shall be the tithe for the Levite."

"This shows that there are some Jews living in this place," said the sages. They inquired of the child that had set aside the tithe where the nearest Jewish house was, and the child led them to a neighboring house.

They were received very cordially by the host, and they were invited to table. At the table they noticed that before any dish was served to them, a part of it was first brought into a chamber. The sages became suspicious, and inquired of the host:

"Why do you always first bring a part of every dish into the bed-chamber?"

"I have an aged father," replied the host, "and many years ago he took an oath not to leave his bed-chamber before he has set eyes upon some of the sages."

"Go then and tell your father to come out to see them, for they are here," said R. Eliezer and R. Joshua.

The host at once went to his father and informed him of the glad news that at last two of the sages of Jerusalem had come to their house. The aged father left his room for the first time in many years, and he was overjoyed at the sight of the sages.

"What is the cause of your confinement?" required the sages of the old man.

"My son is childless," replied the aged man, "and I vowed not to leave my room before I am able to see some of our sages, and ask them to pray that God grant my son a child. Now I beg of you, saintly men, to please pray for my son."

R. Eliezer, moved by the supplication of the aged man, said to R. Joshua: "See what you can do for this man."

R. Joshua thereupon said to the master of the house: "Bring me some flaxseed."

When the seed were brought to him, he spread them on the table. Then it appeared to the people as if the seed had commenced to germinate and

sprout forth. In another moment it appeared to them as if the flax were fully grown, and when R. Joshua plucked the flax, he pulled up, together with the flax stalks, a woman by the locks of her head.

"Remove the spell of your witchcraft from this man," ordered the saintly rabbi.

"I will not remove it," retorted the woman.

"If you refuse to remove it," said the rabbi, "I will expose you."

Frightened at the threat of the rabbi, the witch said: "But I am unable to break the spell, because I threw the charm into the seas, and I cannot get it back."

R. Joshua dismissed the witch, and he said to the angel of the sea: "Give up the charm which this woman has thrown into your waters."

The angel of the ocean obeyed the command of the saintly rabbi, and gave up the charm. The spell broken, the two sages prayed to God on behalf of the host, and he became the father of Rabbi Judah, known thereafter as Rabbi Judah ben B'thera.

5. *The Treasure*

R. Joshua and his colleagues once came to the city of Antioch to collect contributions from the people of the city for the poor students of the college. In that city there lived a man named Abba Judah, who was pious and kind-hearted.

He had been very rich and had given a great deal of his wealth for charitable purposes. But later he became poor, and was unable to continue his good work.

Upon learning that the sages from Jerusalem had come to collect contributions from the inhabitants of the town, Abba Judah was ashamed to show himself to the sages. He came home with a very sad mien and his wife asked: "What may be the cause of your sadness?"

"The sages of Jerusalem have come here to collect money for the poor students," replied the heart-broken Abba Judah, "and I, unable to contribute anything, must keep myself in hiding."

"This should not worry you so much," said his good wife, "we still have a small field left; sell half of it and give the money to the sages."

Abba Judah was delighted at the advice of his good wife. He sold at once half of his small field, and hurriedly took the money over to R. Joshua and his colleagues. The saintly rabbi, upon learning of the circumstances of Abba Judah, prayed: "O God, send Thy blessing into the house of this good man."

Shortly after, while Abba Judah was plowing his field one day, the only ox he possessed to plow with broke one of its legs. He tried to raise the ox by means of an iron bar, and to his great amazement he heard the sound of some metal when the iron bar dug itself into the ground. He began

digging and to his still greater amazement he discovered a treasure. With this money he bought a large estate for himself, and he continued to do good to others.

The following year when R. Joshua again came to Antioch to collect the annual contributions, Abba Judah brought to him a large sum of money, and he added: "Your prayer brought me wealth, and now I can make large contributions."

"Even last year, when you gave us only a small sum of money," responded R. Joshua, "we put your name at the head of the list, for we knew that you had contributed much more than your means permitted."

6. *Joshua and the Roman Emperor Hadrian*

Joshua, because of his peace-loving nature, and because of his great learning, was a favorite of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The rabbi acquainted the emperor with many Jewish beliefs, and as a result the emperor would enter into many disputes with him.

Once Hadrian asked Joshua: "You claim that your God will revive the dead. Tell me from what part of the body will your God cause man to sprout forth when they are to be revived?"

"From the nut of the spinal column," replied the rabbi.

"How can you prove it to me?" asked the emperor.

R. Joshua then ordered that a nut of the spinal column be brought before the emperor. R. Joshua placed the nut in fire, but it was not consumed by the flames. He put it in water, but it was not dissolved. He put it in a grinder, but it could not be ground. Finally he placed it on an anvil and beat it with a hammer. The anvil became flat, and the hammer split, but the nut sustained no injury.

Hadrian, the Roman emperor, once said to R. Joshua: "I would like to see your God."

"O sire," said R. Joshua, "one is not able to see our God."

"Yet I would like to see Him," insisted the emperor.

When the sun shone very bright, R. Joshua invited the emperor to go outside. "O sire," said R. Joshua, "raise your eyes heavenward, and look at the sun."

"I am unable to do so," protested the emperor.

"The sun is but one of the many servants that do the will of our God," said R. Joshua, "yet you claim that you are unable to look at it. How then do you expect to look at its Creator?"

The Roman emperor once said to R. Joshua: "Your God is compared to a lion. What greatness is there in the lion? Is not a hunter able to kill it?"

"Our God is not compared to an ordinary lion," said R. Joshua, "but to a lion from Be Illai."

"I want you to show this lion to me," said the emperor.

"O sire, you are not able to see such a lion," answered R. Joshua.

"Nevertheless, I want to see it," insisted the emperor.

R. Joshua then prayed that the lion begin to move from his den. The lion roared, when at a distance of four hundred parasangs from Rome, and the walls of Rome collapsed. He roared a second time, when at a distance of three hundred parasangs, and the teeth fell out from the mouths of the people, and Hadrian fell off his throne.

"Now, Joshua," said the emperor, "pray that the lion go back to his den."

"I shall comply with your wish," said R. Joshua.

The saintly rabbi then prayed to God, and the lion returned to his den in Be Illai.

7. R. Joshua and the Wise Men of Athens

One day the Roman emperor said to R. Joshua: "If you are really wiser than my enemies the sages of Athens, go and subdue them and bring them captive to me."

"How many of them are there?" inquired R. Joshua.

"There are sixty of them," replied the emperor.

"O sire," said R. Joshua, "provide me with a ship that contains sixty compartments, each of which has sixty chairs in it, and I shall bring you the men whom you desire to have here."

R. Joshua was provided with a ship such as he had demanded and he sailed for Athens. Arriving there, he entered a slaughtering house where a man was stripping the skin of an animal. R. Joshua said to the man: "Is your head for sale?"

"Yes, it is for sale," replied the man.

"What is its price?" inquired R. Joshua.

"Its price is one-half a zuz," replied the man.

"Here is your money, and give me your head," said R. Joshua.

The man took the money and gave R. Joshua the head of the animal. R. Joshua said: "Did I say that I wanted to buy the head of the animal? Did I not say to you: 'Is your head for sale?' And you replied, 'Yes, it is for sale.'"

The man was embarrassed, for he knew not what to answer, and R. Joshua said: "The only way how you can get out of this difficulty is by showing me the place where the sages of Athens can be found."

"How can I do that?" protested the frightened man. "Any one who dares show a stranger the place where the sages may be found is punished by them with death."

"I will advise you how you can point out the place to me without running the risk of being dis-

covered," said R. Joshua. "You take a bundle of reeds and carry it on your shoulder. When you pass by the door of the house where the sages are found, you shall place the bundle on the ground, just as one does with the intention of just resting up."

The man followed the instruction of R. Joshua, and thus the rabbi discovered the house where the sages were to be found. But R. Joshua noticed that there were guards placed on the outside and on the inside of the house, in order to permit no one either to come in or to go out. Sand was spread near the entrance, and if traces of steps were discovered that showed that some stranger had entered the house, the outer guard was punished with death. If the paces showed that somebody had left the house, then the inner guard was executed. But the guards killed nobody unless one forced his way all the way in or all the way out, but not when he just reached the threshold.

"How can I get in?" wondered R. Joshua. He pondered a while and then hit upon a plan. "As long as one is permitted by the guards to stand on the threshold, I know what to do." He walked over the entrance, and placed one foot on the inside and the other on the outside. When told by the guards to keep out of there, R. Joshua retraced his step and made it appear as though one had entered the house and another one had gone out,

The sages, finding human footsteps leading into the house, punished the outer guards with death. And, upon finding footsteps leading out of the house, put to death the inner guards. R. Joshua then walked in without hindrance.

Upon entering, R. Joshua noticed that the younger sages were seated on the higher seats, and the older ones on the lower seats. "I am in a predicament now," thought R. Joshua, "for should I greet the elder sages first, then the younger will kill me, because they will claim that they are more learned than the older ones, as they are seated on the higher seats. Should I greet the younger sages first, the older ones will kill me, for they will say: 'We are greater than those, for we are their elders.'" So R. Joshua, to save himself from death, addressed all together when he greeted them.

"What do you want with us?" asked the sages of Athens, astonished at this intrusion.

"I am one of the sages of Judaea," replied R. Joshua, "and I have come to learn wisdom from you."

"If that is the case," the sages said, "we will ask you some questions."

"Very well," said R. Joshua, "you can ask me some questions; if you defeat me, you can do with me as you please; but if I defeat you, you must feast with me on my ship."

The sages of Athens agreed to the wager, and

they said to R. Joshua, trying to test his wit: "Build for us a castle in the air."

"I certainly cannot build a castle without material," said R. Joshua; "if you will place some bricks and mortar in the air, I will gladly build the castle for you."

"Tell us where the center of the world is?" asked the sages.

R. Joshua pointing with his finger downward, said: "Right here is the center of the world."

"How can you prove to us that this is the center?" asked the sages.

"Well, you just bring some ropes and measure it out," said the sage from Judaea.

"We have a well in the field, and we want you to bring it into the city," said the wise men of Athens.

"Twist some ropes out of bran for me," answered R. Joshua, "and I will fetch the well for you."

"We have some broken millstones," said the wise men of Athens, "sew them together for us."

"Ravel out some threads from the stones for me," said the wise man from Jerusalem, "and I will sew together the stones for you."

"A furrow upon which knives grow, how can it be reaped?" asked the wise men."

"This can be reaped with the horn of an ass," said R. Joshua.

Two eggs were then brought in and placed

before him, and the sages said: "Tell us which was laid by a white hen and which by a black one."

R. Joshua brought two cheeses before them and said: "Tell me first which cheese was made of a white goat and which of a black one; then I will tell you which egg is of a white hen, and which is of a black one."

"A crushed pullet in the egg-shell, how does the spirit get out?" asked the sages.

"The spirit goes out exactly the same way it went in," answered R. Joshua.

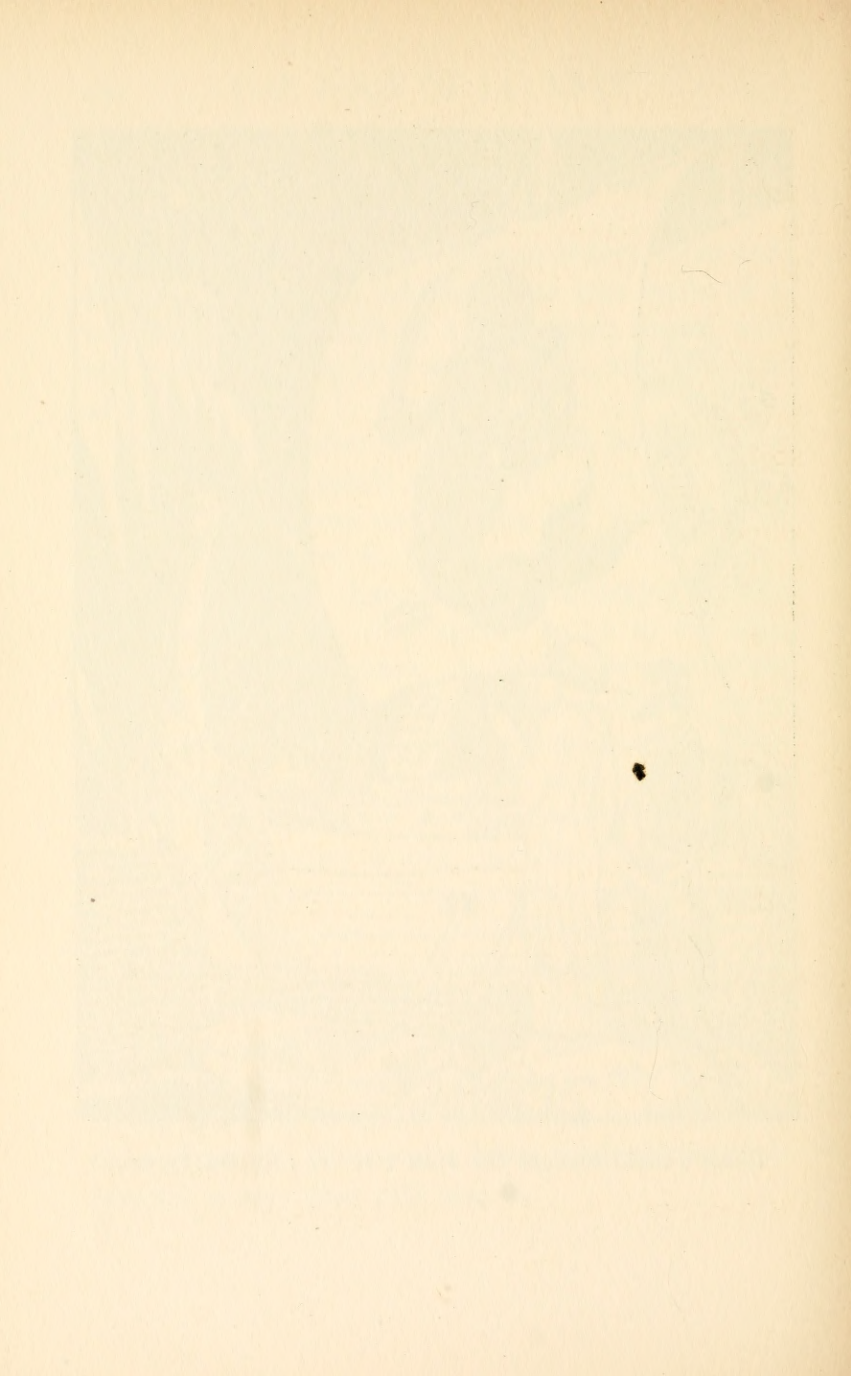
At last, seeing that they were defeated by the sage from Judaea, they agreed to go to the ship and feast with him there. R. Joshua brought them into his ship one by one, and put each and every one of them into a separate compartment. Each and every one of the sages upon entering the compartment and finding sixty chairs there, thought that his colleagues would likewise come into the same compartment. They therefore asked no questions and were thus taken unawares.

When all the sages boarded the ship, R. Joshua said to the captain: "Untie your ship!"

In the meantime R. Joshua took some of the earth of Grecian soil which he put into the ship. When the ship reached the straits, he took some water from it. This water has a tendency to swallow all waters that fall into it.



Rabbi Joshua brought the sages into his ship one by one



When the ship reached port, R. Joshua presented the sixty sages from Athens before Hadrian, the Roman emperor. But the emperor, noticing that the strangers looked discouraged and downcast, he said to R. Joshua: "These are not the sages."

R. Joshua then took some of the earth he had brought from Greece and threw it at them. The sages, invigorated by the odor of the soil from their native land, became arrogant with the emperor. Hadrian then recognized them, and he said to R. Joshua: "Deal with them as you see fit."

R. Joshua took the water which he had brought with him from the straits in a pitcher, and turning to the sages, he said to them: "You will go back to your native land, as soon as you fill up this pitcher with water."

The emperor and the sages from Athens laughed and said: "Some punishment this is!"

One of the sages thereupon brought a bucketful of water and tried to fill the pitcher. But to his great amazement the pitcher would not fill up even after he had emptied the entire bucket of water therein. He then brought another bucketful of water, spilt it into the pitcher, but, alas, the pitcher was not full yet, for the little water that had been spilt in by the rabbi, swallowed all the water spilt thereon by the sages of Athens.

Disappointed and discouraged, the other sages tried to fill the magic pitcher with water, but in vain, the pitcher still remained empty. They kept on pouring water into the small pitcher, until their shoulders were dislocated, and thus they perished one by one.

8. *R. Joshua Outwitted by Children*

One day, as R. Joshua was walking on the road, he met a little boy carrying something in a covered vessel. "What do you carry in this covered vessel, my child?" asked R. Joshua.

"Sir," responded the little boy, "if my mother would want you to know what this vessel contains, she would not tell me to cover it."

As R. Joshua was about to enter Jerusalem, he met a little girl standing by a well and drawing water from it.

"Please, let me have some water," said R. Joshua to the girl.

"I will draw water not only for you," said the little girl, "but even for your ass."

When the rabbi had slaked his thirst and was about to go away, he said to the girl: "My daughter, you have acted kindly as our mother Rebecca did when Eliezer requested her for some water to drink."

"I have acted like our mother Rebecca," meaningfully responded the girl, "but you did not act

like Eliezer." (Eliezer gave gold bracelets and other presents to Rebecca.)

Once, as Rabbi Joshua was walking a highway, he came to a spot where there was a parting of roads. Not knowing which road to take, he asked of a little boy who sat not far from the road: "Tell me, my son, which road do I have to take in order to reach the city?"

The little boy replied: "This road is long but short; the other road is short but long."

R. Joshua thanked the boy, and took the road which was short but long. When he neared the city, he could not pass, for there the road ended abruptly, obstructed by vineyards and orchards. R. Joshua returned to the place where the roads parted, and still finding the little boy seated there, he said to him: 'My son, did you not tell me that this was a short road?'

"Sir," replied the little boy, "but did I not also tell you that it was a long one at the same time?"

As R. Joshua was once crossing a certain field, he was accosted by a little girl: "Master, is not this a private field that you are crossing? Are you not, then, guilty of trespassing?"

"But is not this a trodden-out path that I am walking on?" replied R. Joshua.

"Lawless people like you have trodden out this path in a private field," retorted the little girl.

9. *The Lion and the Crane*

Hadrian upon ascending the throne of Rome, promised the leaders of Judaea to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Elated over the promise of the emperor, the Jewish leaders, Pappus and Julian, placed tables at frequent intervals from Acco to Antioch, and supplied the pilgrims going up to Jerusalem with gold, silver and all necessities.

Envious of the success of the Jews, the Samaritans went to Rome and said to the emperor: "The Jewish people upon rebuilding their Temple in Jerusalem will rebel against you and become independent again."

"What can I do now," said Hadrian; "how can I revoke my promise?"

"O sire," said the Samaritans, "you need not revoke your promise. Command that the Temple be rebuilt not on its former site, or else order that it be rebuilt on the same site, but not in its former dimensions, but either five cubits larger or five cubits smaller than formerly. The Jews will then reject your offer."

Hadrian thereupon commanded that the Temple be rebuilt not on its former site. The Jews were very much embittered at the emperor's evasion of his promise. A great multitude assembled in the Plain of Rimmon, and were about to raise the banner of revolt against the Roman emperor.

R. Joshua, who was a great lover of peace, appeared on the scene. He allayed the excitement of the vast throng by telling them a fable:

"Once upon a time, a lion, after devouring his prey, was greatly troubled by a bone which stuck in his throat. In his pain, the lion proclaimed: 'Any one who will relieve me from pain and remove the bone from my throat, shall be rewarded by me.'

"A crane with a long neck immediately appeared on the scene, and removed the bone from the lion's throat. The crane then said to the lion: 'Now I am ready to receive my reward for the operation I performed on you.'

"But the lion mockingly replied: 'Now you can go around boasting that you put your head in the jaws of a lion and yet you escaped unhurt. Is not this sufficient reward for you?'

"In like manner, let us be glad that we have escaped destruction thus far at the hands of the Romans."

Impressed with the words of the beloved sage, the multitude returned to their homes.

10. *The God of Truth*

One day the Roman emperor said to R. Joshua: "You claim that your God is a God of truth. Why then does he do evil to the innocent ones?"

"O sire," said R. Joshua, "is there a man who can claim that he has never done any evil?"

"Will you maintain that those who are born blind or deaf and dumb have also done evil and provoked the anger of your God?" asked the emperor.

"O sire," said R. Joshua, "you certainly asked me a great question. But our God knows the innermost thoughts of man, and also knows his future. If a man is born blind, or deaf and dumb, it is because that God knows that the man is wicked and sinful."

"How can you prove that?" asked the emperor.

"O sire, if it please you," said the Judæan sage, "I shall prove to you that our God is just. Pray let me have one thousand golden shekels, and let two of your most trustworthy men accompany me, so that they can witness what I am doing."

R. Joshua was granted his request, and accompanied by two of the emperor's trustworthy chamberlains, he went through the streets of Rome. Finally he discovered a man who had been born blind. He approached the blind man, and in the presence of the officials, he said to him in an undertone: "Friend, the emperor ordered that I be killed, and I must run away from here to save my life. I have one thousand golden shekels in my possession which I would like to entrust to you. If I escape death, you will have to return the shekels to me, and I will reward you for your trouble. If I am killed, you can keep the money for yourself as a gift."

The blind man took the money, and he said: "You can rely on me, stranger; I will keep your money in a safe place, and when you return I will return the money to you."

At the end of two months, R. Joshua, accompanied by the two officials, came to the blind man and said to him: "The emperor revoked his decision and saved me from death. Now I demand that you return to me the one thousand golden shekels, which I have entrusted to you."

"What are you talking about?" asked the blind man indignantly. "What have I ever taken from you?"

"Let us then go to the emperor, that he may judge between us," suggested R. Joshua.

When the emperor heard the complaint of R. Joshua, he said: "Have you witnesses who saw you give money to this poor blind man?"

"O sire, I have two witnesses," said R. Joshua.

The witnesses then testified that they had seen R. Joshua give the money to the blind man. Thereupon the latter exclaimed: "O sire, this is untrue. These men are not telling the truth, they are false witnesses. They deserve to be hanged, so that the wicked ones may do no more harm to the innocent."

"Let this blind man, the culprit, be hanged!" commanded the emperor.

Out of the palace, one of the king's officers, at the advice of R. Joshua, whispered into the blind

man's ear: "O you wretch! I have just overheard your wife say to one of her friends: 'As soon as I get rid of my blind husband, I shall get the thousand golden shekels that are hidden in our house, and marry a handsome fellow.' "

Enraged at his wife, the blind man exclaimed: "O please, lead me back before the emperor, and I will tell him the whole truth."

Upon being brought before the emperor, the blind man confessed. The Roman emperor then said: "Verily, R. Joshua, your God is a God of truth."

11. *A Magician Drowned*

Once R. Joshua and two of his colleagues went to bathe in a bath-house in Tiberia. In the bath-house there was a great magician, who hated R. Joshua. The magician murmured a few words, and the feet of R. Joshua and his colleagues stuck to the floor of the bath-house. The three sages were unable to move from the spot.

R. Joshua thereupon prayed to God: "Cause this magician to be stuck to the door of the bath-house."

The prayer of the sage was heard, and the magician became stuck to the door of the bath-house. People, wanting to enter the bath-house, ordered the magician to get out of their way. When he failed to do so he was beaten by every one who

desired to get in. When the people desired to go out, the magician was again in their way, and once more they beat him violently.

"O pray, break the spell you put upon me," begged the magician of R. Joshua, "so that I should be able to get away from here."

"Not unless you first break the spell you put upon me and my colleagues," answered the saintly rabbi.

R. Joshua and the magician, relieved from the spell, left the bath-house. R. Joshua said to the magician: "Is this wherein your greatness lies, that you put a snare for innocent people, who have done you no harm?"

"If you desire to know where my power lies," said the magician, "come with me to the sea-shore."

Joshua accepted the invitation, and he together with his colleagues followed the magician to the sea. There the magician murmured some enchantments and the water of the sea was divided. "You see," said the magician, "I am as great as was your Moses."

"But Moses also went through the sea on dry ground," said R. Joshua; "now if you are really as great as Moses, then let me see you go through on dry ground."

The magician immediately stepped into the opening made in the water, and R. Joshua prayed:

"O God, destroy this wicked man, so that he may do no more evil to innocent human beings."

No sooner had R. Joshua finished praying than the waves of the sea returned to their place, swallowing up the magician.

CHAPTER XIX

NAHUM ISH GAMSU AND R. JOSE BEN P'KIIN

1. *Dust Turned into Spears and Arrows*



IN those days there lived a man who was known as Nahum Ish Gamsu. The reason he was surnamed Gamsu is because he was in the habit of commenting on any occurrence, no matter how unfortunate it was, *Gam zu le tobah*—"This, too, is for the best."

Once the Jews desired to send a gift to the Roman emperor. "Who should go to bring the gift to the emperor?" asked the people of one another.

The unanimous answer came from those assembled: "Let Nahum Ish Gamsu go, because miracles occur to him very often."

The Jews thereupon filled a chest with precious stones and pearls and gave it to Nahum to bring it to Rome. On his way to Rome, Nahum stopped for the night at a certain inn. At night, the innkeeper got up, took out all the precious stones and

pearls from the chest and filled it with earth instead. In the morning, Nahum examined the chest and found that it was full of earth. Knowing that he could not recover his precious stones, he said not a word to the inn-keeper, but simply said to himself: "This, too, is for the best."

On arriving at the palace of the emperor at Rome, Nahum presented the chest to the emperor, saying: "Here is a gift sent to you by my people the Jews."

The emperor opened the chest, and exclaimed: "What, do those people intend to mock me? Not a trace of them shall be left in my empire. Take this wretch," said the emperor, turning to his bodyguard, "and hang him forthwith."

Elijah at once appeared on the scene in the guise of one of the Roman high officials, and he said to the emperor: "Very likely the dust in the chest is of the same kind as was used by Abraham, which, when he threw it at his enemies he was fighting, turned to swords and spears. Do not kill this man, before a trial is made to find out what kind of dust it really is."

Now it so happened that the Romans were then engaged in war against a certain land, and they were unable to conquer it. The emperor ordered that the dust be taken to the front and tested. To the great astonishment of the fighting warriors, the dust thrown at the enemy turned to spears, and killed thousands of the latter.

When the emperor was informed of this, the

balance of the dust was hidden in the treasures of the emperor. The chest brought by Nahum Ish Gamsu was filled with many costly diamonds and pearls and given to him. Nahum Ish Gamsu was then sent back by the Roman emperor with many tokens of honor and esteem.

On his way home, when Nahum again stopped at the inn, the keeper of which had stolen his gems, he was asked by the thief: "Why did the emperor bestow so much honor upon you?"

"I was given so much honor," said Nahum, "because I gave him the earth with which you filled up my chest."

The owner of the inn immediately demolished his inn, dug up as much earth as possible, and conveyed it to Rome to present it to the emperor. On arriving at the palace, the inn-keeper said to the emperor: "Sire, the earth that was given to you by Nahum Ish Gamsu, had been taken by him from my house. Now I brought a great deal more of it, which I wish to present to my emperor."

The emperor had the earth examined, but it was not proven to possess the same quality as that which had been brought by Nahum. "This man is a liar who intended to defraud me," exclaimed the emperor. "Let him be decapitated."

2. The Suffering of Nahum Ish Gamsu

The suffering of Nahum Ish Gamsu in the last days of his life was very great. He was blind in

both eyes, his hands and feet were cut off, and his entire body was covered with boils. He lived in a very dilapidated house, and the legs of his bed were placed in basins full of water, so that no ants should come up on his body.

One day the disciples of Nahum Ish Gamsu wanted to remove their teacher from the dilapidated house. They intended first to remove their teacher, and then the furniture and other belongings. But Nahum said to them: "My children, remove the household goods first, and then me. For, so long as I remain in the house, you may be certain that it will not collapse."

The disciples followed the instruction of their teacher, and as soon as they removed their teacher from the house, the whole building collapsed. The disciples then asked: "Great teacher, since you are such a righteous man, why does Heaven permit you to suffer so much?"

"My children," said the teacher, "I have brought this suffering upon myself. One day I was on the way to the house of my father-in-law, and I had with me three asses laden with food, drink, and all sorts of delicacies.

"On the way I was met by a poor man, who said to me: 'Rabbi, give me some food, for I am hungry.'

"I said to him: 'Wait until I remove the food from one of the asses.'

"Before I had a chance to remove the food from

one of the asses, the poor man fell dead at my feet. He died from starvation.

"I prostrated myself upon the face of the corpse, and said: 'My eyes that had no compassion on your eyes—may they become blind; my hands that had no compassion on your hands—may they be cut off; my feet that had no compassion on your feet—may they be cut off; and I did not feel relieved until I added: 'Let my entire body be covered with boils.'"

"Alas, that we should behold you in a condition like this!" exclaimed the disciples.

"It would be far worse with me, if you were not beholding me in a condition like this," said the suffering Nahum.

3. *R. Jose ben P'kiin*

R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and his colleagues were once traveling together, when they beheld a raven flying toward them. As the raven drew near, he cawed and said: "The soul of R. Jose ben P'kiin has just now gone up to heaven."

"Alas!" they all cried out, "the saint has gone from our midst. "Let us go there and mourn and weep for the righteous man."

Upon entering the house where the corpse of R. Jose ben P'kiin lay, they heard the young son of the dead sage mourning aloud in this wise: "O God, Master of the world! In Thy Torah Thou hast written: 'If a bird's nest chance to be

before thee in the way . . . thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself.' O merciful God, pray act in accordance with the words written in Thy Torah, take my little sister and myself instead of my father, and let him live. True, in Thy Torah is written: 'Thou shalt in any wise let the *dam* go,' but our mother is no more with us, for Thou hast taken her away from us long before. Why then leave on this earth two little forsaken orphans?"

R. Eliezer and his colleagues shed tears of grief when they heard the touching prayer of R. Jose's son. At once a fiery pillar descended from heaven, and it hid the dead rabbi and his son from R. Eliezer and his colleagues. The crying boy, unnoticed by the sages, placed his mouth upon the mouth of his father, and exclaimed: "Only death shall separate me from you, O dear father!"

At that moment, a heavenly voice was heard saying: "Happy art thou, R. Jose! The pleadings and tears of thy son have reached the very throne of Divine Majesty, and twenty-two years have been added to thy life."

The pillar of fire then rose heavenward, and the lifeless R. Jose opened his eyes and beheld his son clinging to his body. R. Eliezer and his colleagues exclaimed: "Happy are we that we have been privileged to behold with our own eyes the resurrection of the dead."

When the sages came near the bed where R.

Jose lay, they discovered that the little boy had fainted. They first attended to him, and then said to R. Jose: "Happy are you that you deserve to have a son whose supplications and tears cleft the very heavens, and brought you back to life."

"My colleagues," said R. Jose, "know you that the three hundred and seventy tears which my son has shed flew up to heaven and disturbed many worlds. When my son recited the verse: 'If a bird's nest chance to be before thee,' the heavenly beings trembled; they surrounded the throne of Divine Majesty, and pleaded that I be brought back to life."

CHAPTER XX

RABBI AKIBA BEN JOSEPH

1. *Rachel Wife of R. Akiba*



IN those days there lived in Jerusalem a very rich and influential man, Kalba S'bua. This rich man had a daughter named Rachel, who was very beautiful and kind-hearted.

Kalba S'bua, owner of many herds of cattle and folds of sheep, employed many shepherds to take care of them, and among those many shepherds there was one whose name was Akiba. The fair daughter of Kalba S'bua fell in love with Akiba, and one day she said to him: "If I consent to be your wife, will you agree to go to some college to acquire knowledge?"

"I solemnly agree to that," replied Akiba.

Knowing that her father would oppose her marriage to a poor and ignorant shepherd, Rachel was married to Akiba without her father's knowledge or consent. When Kalba S'bua became aware of the fact that his daughter was married to the ignorant shepherd, he called for his daughter and said

to her: "Rachel, you must leave my house at once and forever, for I hereby make a solemn vow, that you shall have no share in my estate, either during my lifetime, or after my death."

Rachel knew that her father's will could not be altered, and she left the house with her poor husband to dwell somewhere in a straw-shed. It was the winter season, and all the furniture of the newly-wed couple consisted of the straw that was piled up in the shed. The bridegroom would pick the straw from the beautiful locks of the bride, and say to her: "If I only were able, I would build for you a city like Jerusalem and adorn your head with the most costly jewels set in pure gold."

When Akiba had finished speaking, they heard a knock at the door. The stranger, who was invited in, entered and said: "Pray, let me have some of your straw, for my wife gave birth to a child, and I have not enough money with which to buy even straw on which my wife might rest her head."

This stranger was Elijah in disguise. Akiba and his wife gave Elijah a goodly portion of their straw, and then Akiba said to his wife: "You see, there are some people in this world whose lot is even worse than ours. This poor man has not even straw for his wife."

"I do not at all complain of my lot," said the beautiful bride. "All I want is that you go and acquire knowledge."

2. *The Ignorant Shepherd as Rabbi*

Akiba took leave of his wife and went to study wisdom wherever he might find a school. "Well, I am already forty years," thought Akiba; "who knows if I am not already too old to acquire knowledge?"

As Akiba walked thus lost in thought, he came upon a well in a rock, and he asked: "Who has chiseled out this rock?"

"The constant dripping of the small drops of water made this rock hollow," answered the people who were standing by.

This encouraged the wandering shepherd greatly, for he said, "If the weak drops of water could make an indentation in the solid rock, then surely constant and diligent study ought to have an effect on one's mind which is more plastic."

Akiba at once visited the nearest elementary school, and, seating himself among the very young students, said to the teacher: "I desire to study the alphabet."

The teacher gladly enrolled his new pupil in his school, and in a short time he even spoke with pride of the shepherd, for the new pupil mastered the rudiments of the language in an amazingly short time. In a few months Akiba learned enough to understand the Scriptures in the original, and then he decided to march on further in search of knowledge.

Encouraged by his success in the lower schools,

Akiba finally went to the college of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. There, too, Akiba proved to be a bright and diligent disciple, and he attracted the attention of the great teachers.

As Akiba desired to devote all of his time to his studies, and as he had no means of support, he used to go to the woods every day and bring from there a bundle of wood. Half of it he would sell to buy his daily bread with, and the other half he used for his other needs. He would kindle some pieces of wood, and study before the flame.

Once his neighbors came to Akiba and objected: "Akiba, you simply destroy us with smoke and soot. Sell us your wood and you buy yourself oil, which you can burn and study by its light."

"I make several uses of my wood," answered Akiba: "I study before its light, and I warm myself before its fire. And what is more, I can lay my head on the wood and sleep at night."

Once Rachel, the wife of Akiba, heard that he was in straits. Accordingly, she sold her beautiful locks, and sent the money to her husband that he might continue his studies. The shepherd student was so diligent that after a few years he received the title rabbi at the college of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua.

3. The Vow Annulled

At the end of twelve years, Akiba, now a great scholar, and accompanied by twelve thousand students, returned to his town unannounced. When

he came near the hut where his wife lived, he overheard a conversation between his wife and one of his wicked neighbors:

"Your father was right in vowing that you shall derive no benefit from his property," said the wicked neighbor to the suffering Rachel. "Your husband has deserted you all these years, and never thought of even returning home once."

"If Akiba would only listen to me," retorted the good Rachel, "he would stay away twelve more years and study."

"Since I have her permission," thought R. Akiba, "then I will go and study twelve more years."

So R. Akiba returned to the college with his twelve thousand disciples. There he studied and taught twelve more years, and at the end of that time, he returned with twenty-four thousand pupils. The fame of R. Akiba spread far and wide, and every one in Jerusalem turned out to meet the famous rabbi with his multitude of pupils.

This time Rachel knew that her husband was coming, and, when she, too, was about to go out with the great multitude to meet her husband, her neighbor said: "Why do you not borrow some decent clothes, when you go to meet such a husband?"

"He will recognize me better in these clothes," replied Rachel.

When Rabbi Akiba arrived, Rachel broke away from the crowd, embraced the knees of her husband and kissed him. The disciples were about to push the woman away, but R. Akiba immediately recognized her, and he said to them: "Leave her alone, for whatever you and I know, is due to her."

Kalba S'bua, moved by the great suffering of his daughter, felt remorse in his heart now for having disinherited her, and he looked for an opportunity to have his vow annulled. As soon as he was informed that a great scholar had come to Jerusalem, he went to him and said: "Great teacher! Twenty-four years ago, my daughter, the beautiful and kind-hearted Rachel, married one of my shepherds, an ignorant poor boy, Akiba by name. As she had done it without my knowledge or consent, I vowed that she and her husband should never have any benefit from my property. Now, I can no longer see the suffering of my daughter, and I would like to have my vow annulled. Could you find a legal way to annul it?"

"Kalba S'bua," said R. Akiba, "had you known that Rachel's husband would become a great man would you have vowed that your daughter should never have any benefit from your property?"

"No, I would not have vowed it," emphatically answered Kalba S'bua, "even had I known that her husband would only be acquainted with one

chapter of the Law, or that he would know at least one law."

"Your vow, then, may be legally annulled," stated the great sage; "for I am the poor, ignorant shepherd you speak of."

Kalba S'bua said not a word, but fell at the feet of his son-in-law, and kissed them. The wealthiest man of Jerusalem was now the happiest man in Jerusalem. He gave R. Akiba half of his wealth, and R. Akiba and his very good and pious wife could now live in affluence and happiness.

4. *R. Akiba Rescues a Soul from Gehenna*

One day, while R. Akiba was on the road, he noticed a man, whose countenance was exceedingly black with suffering, carrying a very heavy load of wood and galloping like a horse. R. Akiba ordered him to halt. When the man obeyed, R. Akiba said to him: "I conjure you to tell me the truth: are you a human being, or are you a demon?"

"I was a human being once upon a time," answered the ghost-like man, "but I departed from this world many years ago. Since the day of my death, I am forced to chop wood and to carry a heavy load like the one I have on now, and with the wood I bring I am burned to death three times every day."

"What crimes did you commit in your life-

time," asked R. Akiba, "that you deserve such punishment?"

"I cannot enumerate all the crimes I committed," said the ghost. "But I committed every crime conceivable; now there are watchers who watch me day and night, and give me no rest."

"Did you leave any children behind?" inquired R. Akiba.

"Pray, do not detain me any longer," pleaded the ghost; "for I fear the angels who strike me with fiery lashes when I arrive late; they strike and say: 'Why didst thou tarry so long?'"

"Just tell me if you left a son," pleaded R. Akiba; "for this may bring you relief."

"When I died," said the ghost hastily, "my wife was about to give birth to a child, and that took place in such and such a town."

R. Akiba thereupon marched from town to town, until he arrived in the town which the ghost had mentioned. The people of the town, upon learning of the arrival of the very famous sage, came out to meet him and pay him his respects. R. Akiba lost no time, and he at once inquired where the family of the ghost could be found.

"Why inquire about this wicked man?" wondered the people of the town. "May the memory of the wicked rot away."

"Is his wife alive?" inquired R. Akiba.

"May the memory of her be blotted out!" ex-

claimed the people upon hearing her name mentioned.

"Did he leave any child?" inquired R. Akiba.

"He left a son who was born to him after his death," replied the people; "but he was not even brought into the covenant of Abraham."

"Nevertheless, I would like to see the son," insisted R. Akiba.

When the son was brought before R. Akiba, he permitted himself to be circumcised at the request of the kind rabbi. R. Akiba then taught the boy to recite the benedictions, and on the next Sabbath, the rabbi ordered that the boy be called up for the reading of the Torah. The boy pronounced the benediction over the Torah: "Praise ye the Lord who is to be praised for ever and ever." Immediately the father was removed from Gehenna and placed in Paradise.

That very night the father of the boy appeared to R. Akiba in a dream and said: "Great teacher, let your mind be set at rest, for you have saved me from the doom which had confined me in Gehenna."

5. The Sea Pays the Debt

Once the sages needed a big sum of money for the requirements of the college. They asked R. Akiba to go to a certain Roman lady and borrow money from her. R. Akiba went to the lady and said: "Lend me the money that my colleagues

require, and I will pay it back to you on a certain day."

"Who will guarantee for you that you will pay me the money on time?" inquired the Roman lady.

"I will give as a guarantee whomsoever you wish," replied R. Akiba.

The palace of the lady, being on the shore of the sea, she said to R. Akiba: "Let God and the sea stand security that you repay me on time."

"Let it be as you say," said R. Akiba.

The Roman lady then lent R. Akiba a very large sum of money. When the day for repaying the money came, R. Akiba fell ill, and he was unable to visit the lady and pay her the debt.

The Roman lady, on that very day, went to the shore of the sea and said: "Master of the world, it is known to Thee that R. Akiba is ill and is unable to pay his debt; remember that Thou and the sea are responsible for the payment of it."

At that very moment, the daughter of the Roman emperor was deprived of her mind. She entered the treasury of the emperor, took a little basket full of gems and golden coins, and threw it into the sea. The sea cast it out at once on dry land near the palace of the Roman lady, who picked it up.

After R. Akiba had recovered from his illness, he visited the lady and was ready to pay the debt. But the lady said: "You need not pay me, for

when the day for payment came and you were ill, I went and demanded from your guarantees that they pay the debt. Now," she said, opening a chest full of gems and gold coins, "see for yourself that they have paid me more than you owed me."

The lady gave R. Akiba costly gems and pearls and said to him: "Take whatever your guarantees paid me over and above the money you borrowed from me."

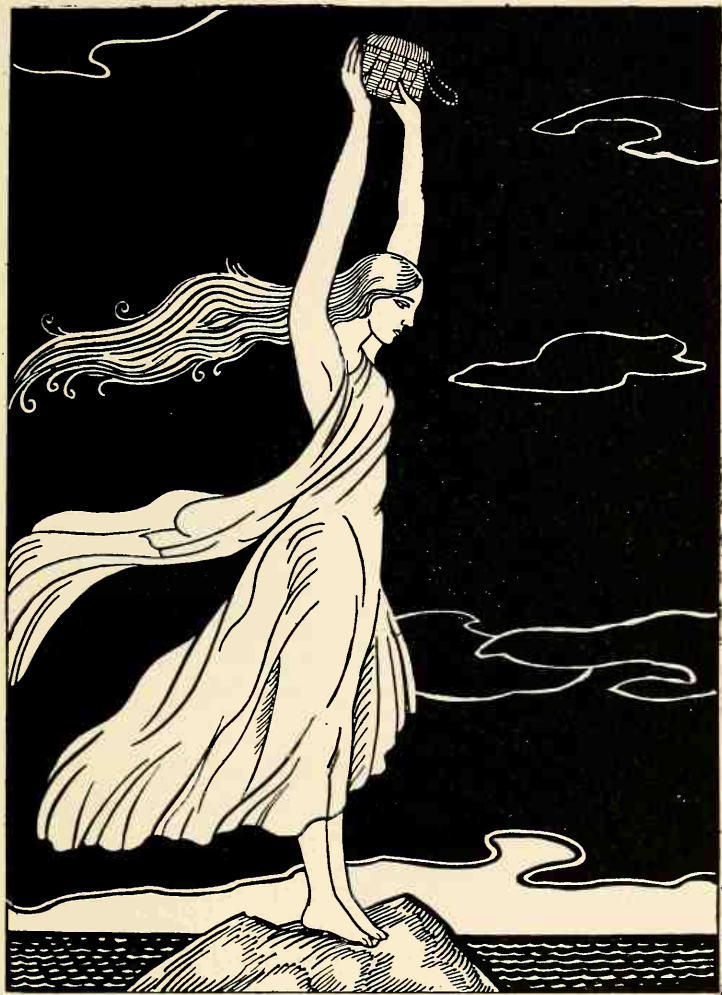
6. *"This, Too, Is for the Best"*

One day R. Akiba saddled his ass, and set out for a far-off destination. With him he took along a cock to wake him up in the morning, and a lantern to light his way at night.

Toward evening, R. Akiba arrived at a certain town, and he asked one of the inhabitants to permit him to stay over night in his house. "No," said the owner of the house, "no strangers can sleep in my house."

R. Akiba then went to another man and asked for permission to stay in his house over night. But here, too, R. Akiba met with a refusal. He asked a third man, and that one also refused the rabbi's request.

"This, too, is for the best," said R. Akiba, and he left the town in the dark of night. He reached some forest and there he lay down beneath a tree to sleep over night. He lit the lamp so that he could see how to arrange things, but a strong gust



The Roman Princess, deprived of her mind, threw a basket full of gems into the sea

of wind blew the lamp out. "This, too, is for the best," said R. Akiba.

R. Akiba tied his ass and his cock to a thick tree in the forest, and he himself climbed up the tree to rest among its thick branches. Suddenly he heard the outcry of his cock. He looked closely and saw a fox come and devour the cock. R. Akiba said: "This, too, is for the best."

R. Akiba lay down again to rest in the thick branches of the tree. Soon he was disturbed by the loud roar of a lion. He looked around in fright, and he saw a lion approach the tree to which the ass was tied, and devour the animal. Again R. Akiba said: "This, too, is for the best."

At midnight, R. Akiba was aroused from his sleep by the tramping of many feet. He saw a band of armed bandits walking on their way to the town where he had been denied shelter.

At daybreak, R. Akiba descended the tree and with a gay heart started to walk on foot, when he was overtaken by three inhabitants of the town. "Rabbi," said they breathlessly, "an armed band of robbers descended upon our town last night, and killed all the inhabitants, and only the three of us escaped death."

"Now I know that whatever God does is for the best," said R. Akiba. "If I had been granted shelter in the town, I, too, would have been slain by the robbers together with the townspeople. If the wind had not put out the light of my lantern,

and if my cock and my ass had not been killed, I would have been detected by the robbers and killed when I was in the forest."

7. *Visiting the Sick*

One day one of the many disciples of R. Akiba fell ill, and the kind-hearted sage inquired: "Does the sick young man have any relatives or friends in this town?"

"He is a total stranger in this place," was the reply; "his parents dwell in Galilee, and in this town he has not even as much as an acquaintance."

R. Akiba at once went to visit his bedridden disciple. On entering the small room occupied by the sick youth, R. Akiba looked around, and he noticed that the room was filthy and filled with dust, and that there was no one to tend to the pale youth who lay motionless in a bed which contained unclean bedding. R. Akiba immediately began cleaning up the room. He wiped away the dust, swept the house, changed the linen, gave the youth some nourishment, and added soothing words: "My son, do not worry, for your sickness will soon pass, and you will be well again."

The visit and the kind attention of the great beloved teacher, immediately had a good effect upon the ill youth. He opened his eyes, looked with tender kindness at the rabbi, and said: "Rabbi, you indeed made me feel well again."

The youth became well after a short time, and R. Akiba said to his numerous disciples: "He who does not visit the sick, is like one who sheds blood."

8. *R. Akiba Accepts Condolence*

R. Simeon, the son of R. Akiba, fell sick, but R. Akiba did not because of that interrupt his lectures at the college. He every now and then sent messengers to inquire about the condition of his son. When the first messenger came back, he said: "Rabbi, the condition of your son has become worse."

R. Akiba made no reply, but addressing the multitude said: "Keep on propounding your questions of law."

When the second messenger came, he announced: "Rabbi, the condition of your son has become grave."

R. Akiba again made no reply, but he said to his disciples: "Let us continue our studies."

A third messenger came and said: "Rabbi, your son is dying!"

Although very much touched by the report, R. Akiba again said to his disciples: "Continue to ask your questions of law."

A fourth messenger then came and said: "Rabbi, alas, your son has passed away."

R. Akiba then removed his phylacteries, rent

his garments, and said to his pupils: "Until now we were in duty bound not to interrupt our studies, but now we are bound to go and honor the dead."

A very large multitude assembled to honor the dead son of the very famous and beloved rabbi. They all accompanied the dead to the graveyard, and mourned bitterly. When they were about to go home, R. Akiba addressed them: "Pray, listen, O my brethren! Although my beloved son passed away when he was a bridegroom, I will be comforted by you. For you assembled here in such great multitudes, not because I am wise, for there are men in this multitude who are wiser than I am; neither because I am wealthy, for there are people here who are wealthier than I am. If the people of the south know Akiba, how do the people of Galilee know him? If the men know Akiba, how do the women and the little children know him? You did not come for the sake of Akiba, for there are many Akibas in the street! I am convinced that you came here in order to perform a religious duty and to do honor to the Torah; therefore the more reason why your reward should be double. I am comforted; return to your homes in peace."

9. *The Merit of Doing Charity*

There lived in Jerusalem a pious man who was known to everybody because of his charitable deeds. Once this pious man sailed in a vessel. The

vessel encountered a heavy gale on the sea, and sank with all the passengers on board.

At that very time R. Akiba happened to be sailing in another vessel, which came to the rescue of the unfortunate people. R. Akiba recognized the pious man among the drowning passengers, but could no longer save him from death. Thereupon R. Akiba returned to Jerusalem and was about to testify before a court of law that the pious man had perished at sea, and that therefore the wife of the man was at liberty to marry again.

Before R. Akiba had an opportunity to give his testimony, the pious man came before him. R. Akiba asked in amazement: "Are you the one that was drowned at sea?"

"I am the very one, rabbi," replied the pious man.

"And who saved you from the depths of the sea?" inquired R. Akiba.

"My charitable acts saved me from death," answered the man.

"How do you know that you were saved because of that?" asked R. Akiba.

"When I was in the depths of the sea," replied the pious man, "I heard a very loud noise made by the waves, one wave saying to the other: 'Hurry, let us bring this man up from the bottom of the sea; let us save his life, for he has been charitable all his life.'"

R. Akiba then raised his hands heavenward and

said: "Praised be the Lord, whose words are the words of everlasting truth, for it is written: 'Righteousness (charitable deeds) will save from death.' "

R. Akiba had a daughter whom he loved dearly. One day some soothsayers visited his house, and, upon seeing his daughter, said to him: "On the day your daughter will wed, she will be bitten by a serpent and die."

R. Akiba was very much worried about the fate of his beloved daughter. When the day came for his daughter to get married, the rabbi watched over her constantly.

On that very day, the bride took a long gold pin and stuck it into the wall of her chamber. The pin stuck into the eye of a serpent that was hidden in the wall, and remained there all night. On the following morning, when the bride pulled the pin out, a dead serpent clung to it. R. Akiba was pleasantly surprised and he asked: "My daughter, what did you do to deserve such a miracle?"

"Father," said the bride, "last night at the wedding-feast, a poor man came to the door and asked for a meal. Everybody was busy and therefore took no notice of him. Thereupon I got out of my seat, and gave him the portion of food that had been served to me."

"You did a very meritorious deed, my daughter," said R. Akiba, "and you deserved that your life be saved."

10. *R. Akiba and Anius Rufus*

T. Anius Rufus, a Roman commander under the emperor Hadrian, once said to R. Akiba: "Why do you honor the Sabbath more than any other day?"

"Pray tell me," said R. Akiba, "why are you better than any other man that you deserve all these honors?"

"Because my emperor saw fit to honor me above others," replied Rufus.

"Then the Supreme King of kings saw fit to honor this particular day above the others," stated R. Akiba.

"But how can you tell that this particular day is the one chosen by your God?" asked Rufus.

"Let the river Sambation prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath," said R. Akiba; "for during all the days of the week, it throws up stones, but on Saturday it rests."

"You bring me evidence which cannot be proven," said Rufus.

"Let the one who divines by ghosts prove that the seventh day is the Sabbath," said R. Akiba. "For every day in the week he is able to divine by ghosts, but on the seventh day, he is unable to do so. And, if this is not sufficient proof for you, let your father's grave prove that the seventh day is Sabbath. Every day in the week, his grave emits a smoke, but on the seventh it does not emit any smoke."

Rufus then tried to bring up the ghost of his father on the seventh day, but he did not succeed. He then tried to bring it up on a weekday, and he succeeded. Rufus asked his father: "Why did you refuse to come up on the Jewish Sabbath? Did you become a Jew after your death?"

"With you on earth one is required to observe the Sabbath," replied the ghost of Rufus' father, "but if one chooses not to observe it, he is at liberty to do so. But with us, in the other world, one is forced to observe the Sabbath, whether he wills it or not."

"Why, what kind of work have you there, in the other world, on weekdays," asked Rufus, "that you speak of resting on the Sabbath?"

"On weekdays we are judged and punished," replied the ghost, "but on the Sabbath, we rest, and are let alone."

Once Rufus asked of R. Akiba: "Why does your God hate the heathens?"

"To-morrow I shall give you an answer to that," replied R. Akiba.

On the following day, when R. Akiba visited Rufus, the latter asked: "Well, rabbi, what kind of dream did you have last night, and what did you see there?"

"In my dream I saw two dogs," replied R. Akiba; "the name of the first dog was Rufus, and the name of the other dog was Rufina."

"So you called the dogs by my name and by the name of my wife?" shouted the commander, enraged at the insult. "You deserve death for the insult you heaped upon our emperor."

"Why, is there really any difference between you and the dogs?" asked R. Akiba. "You eat and drink and they eat and drink; you live and die and they live and die. Yet you became enraged when I called them by your name. The Holy One, blessed be His name, is the creator of heaven and earth. He causes death and grants life. Yet you take a piece of wood, and you call it by His name. Should He not hate you then?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE REVOLT AGAINST THE ROMANS

1. *The Uprising Against Trajan*



AFTER the destruction of the Temple by Titus, the Jews suffered greatly under the emperors of the Flavian dynasty. Domitian, who succeeded Titus to the crown of Rome, was very cruel toward the Jews. But his successor Nerva was more humane and tolerant toward the Jews. Unfortunately his reign was very short, for it lasted only sixteen months.

Nerva chose as his successor to the throne the Spaniard Ulpianus Trajan, who was then sixty years old. He was very cruel toward the Jews, and the suppressed people rose in revolt against the Roman tyrant. The leaders of the rebellion in Judaea, were the two very courageous men from Alexandria, Julianus and Pappus.

On the night of the Ninth of Ab, when the Jews mourned in commemoration of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the wife of Emperor Trajan gave birth to a son. This newly born prince happened to die the following Hanukah,

when the Jews celebrated the anniversary of the victory of Judas Maccabee over the Greeks.

The Jews hesitated and said to one another: "What shall we do under these circumstances? If we celebrate, the emperor may take that as an insult." After much deliberation, they said: "Let us light the candles and celebrate, and come what may."

Slanderers then came to the wife of Trajan and said: "See what friends the Jews are to Rome. When you gave birth to a son, they mourned and wept, and when your son died, they celebrate and rejoice."

Enraged by this report, she sent a message to Trajan: "O sire, why exert all your energy to subdue barbarians? Rather come and suppress the revolt of the Jews, for they have rebelled against you."

Trajan at once embarked in a vessel, and figured on reaching Judaea within ten days, but aided by favorable winds, he arrived there at the end of five days. When he came to Judaea, he entered a house of study, and he heard the students explain the verse: "The Lord will bring a nation against thee from far . . . as the vulture swoopeth down."

"I am the one you refer to," exclaimed Trajan. "I expected to arrive here in ten days, but the winds brought me here in five days." He ordered his legions to surround the students, and to slay ali of them.

'At the command of Trajan, the women, too, were put to the sword. The blood of the women mingled with the blood of the men, forming a stream, and the blood of the slain could be traced in the sea as far as Cyprus.

The Roman general Lucius Quietus, who was delegated by Trajan to suppress the revolt of the Jews, treated the rebels with the utmost cruelty. Julianus and Pappus, the leaders of the revolt, fell into the hand of Quietus. The general sarcastically remarked to the two heroes: "If you belong to the same people as did Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, then let your God come and deliver you out of my hand, as he delivered them out of the hands of Nebuchadnezzar."

"Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were very pious men, and Nebuchadnezzar was an independent ruler, therefore they were worthy that a miracle should occur for their sake. But you are nothing but the servant of one higher up, and therefore you are scarcely worthy that a miracle should occur for your sake. We are condemned to destruction by the Almighty, and if you do not slay us, He has many other executioners: there are many bears, many lions and many tigers who meet a human being and kill him. The Holy One, blessed be His name, chose to deliver us into your hands; but know that He will avenge our blood upon you."

Unmoved by the plea and heroism of the two

rebel leaders, Quietus ordered that they be executed. But while the two prisoners were being led to a martyr's death, a despatch was received announcing the death of the Roman Emperor Trajan, and by the command of the new Emperor Hadrian, the head of Quietus was battered with clubs until he gave up his ghost.

2. *Bar-Kokhba*

The new Emperor Hadrian was well disposed toward the Jews at first, and he even permitted them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But the Samaritans slandered the Jews, and the emperor ordered that the Temple be erected on a different site. This enraged the Jews, and many people armed themselves and assembled in the valley of Rimmon ready to wage war against the Romans. But, as has been related,¹ the peaceful R. Joshua allayed the anger of the excited people by relating a fable to them.

The tolerant relations between Hadrian and the Jews did not last very long. The Roman emperor wanted the Jews to merge with the Romans and become one people. He therefore ordered that Jerusalem be rebuilt, but not as a city for the Jews, but for the pagans. This filled the Jews with resentment, and they rose in open revolt against Hadrian.

The chief hero of this revolt was Bar-Kokhba

¹ See page 234.

who inspired the Roman empire with terror. The real name of this hero was Bar-Koz'ba. But R. Akiba, who was actively engaged in delivering his people from the Roman yoke, was so much impressed by the imposing personality of the hero that he applied to him the verse: "A star (kokhba) has arisen in Jacob." Henceforth the hero was known as Bar-Kokhba.

Akiba was so much carried away by enthusiasm that he believed Bar-Kokhba to be the real Messiah, who was destined to relieve the Jews from foreign yoke. Johanan ben Torta, a teacher of the Law, said to the enthusiastic rabbi: "Akiba, grass will grow from your chin long before the Messiah appears."

The homage the very beloved teacher R. Akiba paid to Bar-Kokhba, and the supernatural strength of the rebel leader, gained him many followers. Bar-Kokhba was so powerful that he used to throw back with his knees the huge stones which the Romans hurled upon the Jewish army by means of machines.

Jews from all countries, impelled by the desire to shake off the unbearable Roman yoke, poured into Judaea to aid the Messianic king Bar-Kokhba. But Bar-Kokhba would not enlist every applicant in his army. He would put every recruit to the test. If the applicant would, without complaint and without showing any signs of suffering, have his thumb cut off, he was declared eligible to join

the revolutionary army. The number of those who submitted to such painful operation reached two hundred thousand.

The sages then sent a message to the Messianic king: "How long will you keep on maiming the children of Israel?"

"How else can I test their courage and their faithfulness?" asked Bar-Kokhba.

"Put them to this test," replied the sages: "He who is unable to uproot a cedar-tree from the Lebanon, while riding on horse, shall not be eligible to join your ranks."

Bar-Kokhba followed the advice of the sages, and he put the recruits to the test they suggested. In a short period of time there were additional two hundred thousand soldiers enlisted, who were able to uproot a cedar from the Lebanon while riding on horseback. The Messianic king felt so confident of his own courage and that of his numerous warriors, that he uttered a blasphemy: "Lord, if Thou dost not help us, at least do not help our enemies, and we shall not be defeated. For hast not Thou, O God, cast us off? And Thou goest not forth, O God, with our hosts."

T. Annius Rufus, the Roman governor, was defeated by Bar-Kokhba. The defeated Roman commander withdrew from one citadel to another, and a great number of fortified cities and villages fell into the hands of the rebels. The new forces sent by Hadrian also suffered defeat at the hands

of Bar-Kokhba, and the rebel leader remained king over Judaea for two years.

3. *The Capture of Bethar*

Hadrian, who at first thought little of the Jewish rebellion, now realized the seriousness of the situation. Every new general he sent against the Jews suffered defeat on the battle-fields of Judaea, and Hadrian was obliged to summon his greatest general, Julius Severus, to suppress the revolt. Severus was at that time engaged in suppressing the revolt of the Britons, but he was recalled to Judaea to match swords with Bar-Kokhba.

On his arrival, Severus found the military position of the Jews so secure, that he did not dare to engage them in battle at once. He decided first of all to cut off all the food supplies from Bar-Kokhba's army, and thereby force them to surrender.

Finally Severus forced Bar-Kokhba and his army to retreat to the strongly fortified city of Bethar. For three years, Severus laid siege against Bethar, but was unable to conquer it. Hadrian and his general were about to raise the siege, when a Samaritan came to their assistance.

Now, in Bethar there lived a saintly man, whose name was Eleazar of Modin. This pious man would every day pray to God, in sackcloth and ashes, that Bethar might not fall into the hands of the enemy. The Samaritan said to the Roman

emperor: "As long as that hen cackles in ashes, Bethar will not be captured. Do not give up the siege, but wait for me, and I will bring about its fall."

Thereupon the Samaritan entered the besieged city through a subterranean passage. He walked over to the saintly R. Eleazar while he was engaged in prayer, and feigned that he was whispering something in his ear. Those who were present, became suspicious of the secrecy between the Samaritan and R. Eleazar, and they went and reported to Bar-Kokhba: "Your friend Eleazar desires to deliver this country into the hands of Hadrian."

The Messianic king at once called for the Samaritan spy, and said to him: "What did you say to R. Eleazar?"

The Samaritan replied: "If I tell you the truth, my emperor will kill me; if I refrain from telling it to you, you will kill me; but I would rather die than disclose the secrets of my emperor."

Bar-Kokhba suspected a traitorous plot between R. Eleazar and the enemy, and he immediately summoned the rabbi to appear before him.

"Tell me what this Samaritan whispered in your ear," demanded Bar-Kokhba.

Eleazar, who had been so absorbed in his prayers that he hardly noticed the Samaritan, replied: "I do not know what he whispered in my ear, for I was then absorbed in prayer."

"And what did you say to him then?" thundered back Bar-Kokhba.

"I said nothing to him," replied the saintly rabbi.

Bar-Kokhba became enraged by the replies of R. Eleazar, for he thought that R. Eleazar was deceiving him. In his fury he kicked the rabbi. The latter, enfeebled by fasting, instantly fell dead at the feet of the Messianic king. Then a heavenly voice was heard: "Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth his flock! Thou hast lamed the arm of Israel and blinded his eyes; therefore shall thine arm and thine eye lose their power."

Thereupon Bethar fell into the hands of the Romans, and Bar-Kokhba was killed. One soldier brought the head of Bar-Kokhba to the Roman emperor, who inquired: "Who killed him?"

"I killed him," boasted the soldier.

"Bring his body here, so that I can examine it," ordered the emperor.

When the body of the rebel leader was brought before Hadrian, he exclaimed: "Why, his body has been crushed by a snake! Had not God's hand killed him, no human hand could have injured him."

Thereupon a fearful slaughter of the Jews of Bethar began. The number of the people slain was so great, that horses waded up to their nostrils in blood, and a crimson river flowed into the sea which was four miles distant from Bethar.

4. *The Wickedness of Hadrian*

The hatred of Hadrian toward the Jews was now boundless. Once a Jew passed Hadrian and saluted him, and Hadrian asked: "Who are you?"

"I am a Jew," answered the passer-by.

"Remove the head of this villain!" cried out the emperor.

Another Jew who was about to pass by saw that his friend was killed for saluting the emperor; accordingly he passed by without saluting him. Hadrian inquired: "Who are you?"

"I am a Jew," answered the passer-by, thinking that he was safe.

"A Jew should dare to pass by the emperor of Rome without saluting him!" said Hadrian. "Remove the head of this villain, too."

Thereupon his councilors said to Hadrian: "O sire, we fail to understand your actions. You kill the one who salutes you, and you also kill the one who does not."

"Do you have to teach me how to kill off my enemies?" sneeringly asked Hadrian.

Hadrian stationed three guards, one in Ham-math, one in the village of L'katia, and the third one in Bethlehem. "Now they will have no escape," boasted the Roman emperor.

Thousands of Jews were hiding in caves and in other secret places. Hadrian issued an order

that whoever would come out from his hiding-place should be spared. Some did not rely on the promise of Hadrian and refused to come out. But many thousands trusted Hadrian's word, and did come out from their hiding-places. They were all assembled in the valley of Rimmon, and Hadrian said to the commander: "Before I get through eating this slice of bread, and this leg of a chicken, there should not remain one Jew standing on his legs."

The Roman legions at once surrounded all the Jews that were gathered there and killed them all.

5. *Hadrian Desires to Be Deified*

Hadrian conquered the whole world. When he returned to Rome from his victorious expeditions, he said to his courtiers: "I desire that you consider me a god and worship me as such, for I have conquered the whole world."

"O sire," said the courtiers, "you have not as yet gained dominion over His city and over His house, the Temple."

So Hadrian went and destroyed whatever there was left of the Temple, and dispersed the remnant of Israel in foreign lands. He then returned to Rome, and said to his courtiers: "I have already conquered the God of the Jews; I have destroyed His city, burned His Temple and exiled His people. Now pay me divine homage, for I am a god."

Among the courtiers of the Roman emperor there were three great philosophers, and each of them made reply to the demands of the emperor. The first one said: "O sire, one cannot rebel against the king while in his palace. One must needs go outside of the palace and raise the banner of revolution. If you desire to rebel against God, you must go outside of His palace and raise the banner of revolution against Him. The heaven and the earth is the palace of God, for He has created them. You must then go outside of the heaven and the earth and revolt against Him."

The second philosopher said: "O sire, you will not be able to rebel against God, because He has already announced by His prophets: 'Thus shall ye say unto them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens."'"

The third philosopher said: "O sire, pray help me out in this hour of distress."

"What is the trouble?" inquired the emperor.

"O sire," pleaded the third philosopher, "I have a ship about three miles away from the shore, and she is tossed about by the mighty billows of the sea, which threaten to sink her, and everything I possess in this world is on that ship."

"I shall immediately send forward my mighty fleet and my sailors to rescue your ship," said the emperor.

"O sire, why trouble your sailors and send your

fleet?" asked the philosopher. "Just order a little wind to blow her toward the shore, and the ship is saved."

"What have I to do with the wind, that you tell me to order it there?" asked the king.

"O sire," said the philosopher, "if you are unable to create even as much as a breeze, how then can you expect to be a god and manage the whole world?"

Disappointed and discouraged, Hadrian went to his private chamber, where he was met by the empress. The latter asked: "O sire, why do you look so downcast?"

"I desire that my subjects pay me the divine homage due a mighty god, and they tell me that I am a plain mortal," replied the emperor.

"Your courtiers have deceived you, O sire," said the empress. "You are verily a mighty emperor, and nothing can be in your way. There is only one thing that you must do, and then you will become a god. Give up to Him the thing that He has entrusted to you, and then you will become a deity."

"And what is the thing that I must give up?" inquired the emperor in astonishment.

"O sire, just give up to Him the soul that He has given to you upon your birth," said the empress.

"How will I be able to do anything without my soul?" asked the emperor, flying into a rage.

"If you have no control over your own soul," said the empress, "how do you expect to be considered a god, the creator of heaven and earth? O sire, you are nothing but an ordinary mortal."

King Hadrian and the Figs

Once King Hadrian passed with his mighty armies through a small village, on his way to put down a rebellion in one of his conquered provinces. In the village, the emperor saw an old man planting fig shoots, and he asked the planter: "How old are you?"

"O sire," replied the old man, "your humble servant is one hundred years old."

"You are one hundred years old, and you still expect to eat of the fig-trees you are planting now?" inquired the emperor.

"O sire, it is my duty to plant. If I am destined to eat of its fruit, well and good. If not, I will have done my duty just as my parents have done theirs. They planted trees and left them for their descendants, and I, too, plant trees and will leave them for my children."

Hadrian spent three years in quelling the rebellion. When he returned from his expedition, he came to the place where the old villager had been, and to his delight he found the old man still alive. The old man now took a little basket, filled it with figs and presented it to the Roman emperor, saying: "O sire, pray accept these figs. I am the same

old man whom you saw three years ago planting fig-trees. The Lord was good to me and let me live to eat of the fruit of my labor. The figs in this little basket are from the very tree I then planted."

The emperor was greatly pleased with the gift presented to him, and he said to his courtiers: "Empty this basket, and fill it with gold coins and give it to this ambitious old man."

The old man thanked the good emperor. His body trembling all over with excitement, he took the basket full of gold and brought it home to his wife. He told his wife and his children of what had happened, and they all rejoiced over it.

A neighbor of the old man happened to be present when the old man told his story. She came home and said to her husband: "All the other men are trying to do something, and the good Lord is kind to them. But you always sit in your house, never trying to do anything. Look at our neighbor, the old man. He presented the emperor with a basket full of figs, and in return he received a basket full of gold. Try to do the same thing. Take a big basket, fill it with all sorts of fruit, nuts and other good things, which are to the liking of the emperor, and present it to him. Maybe he will fill the basket with gold, as he did to our neighbor."

The man lost no time. He took a big basket, filled it with all kinds of dainty food and fruit,

put the basket on his shoulder, and took it to the emperor. He entered unannounced and he addressed the emperor thus: "O sire, I was told that you are a lover of fruit, and therefore I came here to honor you with some figs."

Hadrian said to his captains: "Take these fruits from the imbecile and strike his face with them."

The captains pelted the poor man mercilessly with the fruit until his face became swollen, and his eyes dimmed. He reached home broken-hearted and discouraged. His wife, noticing his condition, asked: "What happened to you?"

"All the honor and glory I received at the hands of our good emperor, I will now give you," said the poor man.

"Thank your stars," said his wife, "that you happened to have figs in your basket and not lemons, and that the figs were ripe and soft and not green and hard."

CHAPTER XXII

ONKELOS

1. *Onkelos Consults the Spirits*



ONKELOS bar Kelonikos was a nephew of Titus. He was desirous of embracing Judaism, and he therefore decided to find out what position the Israelites occupy in the world to come. He was a great magician and necromancer. He would take skulls and bones and would pretend to talk to them. He would bring up the spirits of people long dead and find out what is taking place in the other world. He brought up his uncle Titus from the other world, and asked: "Who occupies an exalted position in the other world?"

"The Israelites," answered Titus.

"Is it advisable for one to join them?" asked Onkelos.

"Their laws are numerous, and it is impossible to fulfill them," answered the ghost of Titus. "Go and engage in battle with them, and you will become their chief; for whoever oppresses Israel becomes a chief."



Onkelos was a great magician

"And what is the nature of your punishment in the other world?" inquired Onkelos.

"I am punished with what I decreed upon myself when alive," said Titus. "Every day they gather together my ashes, and bring me to life. They then judge me, find me guilty, burn me again and scatter my ashes over the seven seas."

Onkelos then brought up Balaam, the heathen prophet, from the other world, and he asked: "Who occupies an exalted position in the other world?"

"The Israelites," answered the heathen prophet.

"Is it advisable for one to join them?" inquired Onkelos.

"Seek not their peace nor their prosperity," advised the heathen prophet.

Finally Onkelos brought up Jesus from the other world, and he asked him too: "Who occupies an exalted position in the future world?"

"The Israelites," answered Jesus.

"Is it advisable for one to join them?" inquired Onkelos.

"Seek their welfare, but not their misfortune," advised Jesus; "for whosoever touches them, fares as badly as he who touches the pupil of his eye."

2. Onkelos the Convert

Onkelos now made up his mind to embrace Judaism, but he feared the wrath of Hadrian. One day Onkelos said to the emperor: "I would

very much like to engage in some business venture."

"If you need money," said the emperor, "then all my royal treasures are open to you; you can take as much gold and silver as you please."

"I would like to go abroad," said Onkelos, "to learn the ways and customs of man. I would like to consult you, O sire, how to go about it."

"Whenever you see goods the price of which is very low," advised Hadrian, "buy it, for you may be sure that the value will go up."

Onkelos thereupon went to the land of Israel, and there he engaged in the study of the Torah. After some time, Onkelos was met by R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. The rabbis noticed a great change in the countenance of Onkelos, and they said to one another: "No doubt Onkelos is engaged in the study of the Torah, and for this reason his countenance has changed."

When Onkelos embraced Judaism, the emperor sent a legion of soldiers to seize him. When the soldiers came to Onkelos, the convert explained to them some portions of the Bible, and they too embraced Judaism. The emperor then sent another legion of soldiers to arrest Onkelos and ordered them not to enter with him into any conversation at all.

When the soldiers reached Onkelos, they seized him and refused to listen to any portions of the

Bible. Onkelos thereupon said: "Friends, I shall not try to explain to you any passage of the Jewish Law, but I will tell you something else. You know that the torch-bearer carries a torchlight before the chief lexicarius; that the chief lexicarius carries a torchlight before the dux; the dux carries a torchlight before the general; the general carries a torchlight before the king. But does the king ever carry a torchlight before any man?"

"No, he never does," replied the Romans.

"But the King of Israel, the Holy One, blessed be His name," said Onkelos, "He carries a torchlight before his subjects, the children of Israel. When they departed from the land of Egypt, He went before them in a pillar of fire to show them on the way."

This legion, too, embraced Judaism, and the Roman emperor sent a third legion and he said to the soldiers: "You must not enter into any conversation at all with him."

When the soldiers came to the land of Israel, they put Onkelos under arrest, and were about to convey him to Rome. As he was led out by them, he noticed a mezuzah fastened to the door. He placed his hand on it and laughed.

"Why are you laughing?" asked the soldiers.

"It is the custom with mortals," said Onkelos, "that the king sits in his palace, and his guard watch him from without. But in the case of the

Holy One, blessed be His name, it is the reverse: His subjects are on the inside, and He watches over them from without."

This group of soldiers, too, adopted the Jewish faith, and the emperor no longer sent for Onkelos to be brought to Rome.

Satisfied with the knowledge he had acquired, Onkelos returned to Rome, where he visited his uncle Hadrian.

"Why has your appearance changed so?" inquired the Roman emperor. "Did your business fare badly, or did anybody dare do you harm?"

"O sire, this is not the case," responded Onkelos. "Would any one dare do me harm when you are my uncle?"

"Why then do you look so bad?" asked the emperor.

"It is because I studied the Torah of the Jews," answered Onkelos. "Moreover, I have even embraced Judaism."

"Who advised you to do that?" asked the emperor in a rage.

"O sire, you advised me to do that," answered Onkelos.

"I? When did I ever advise you to become a Jew?" asked the emperor in amazement. "Are you really out of your senses?"

Onkelos replied: "O sire! Before I left Rome, I consulted you. You then advised me to buy

merchandise which is at the lowest price, and which is mostly despised by people. I then went among many nations and peoples, and nowhere did I find a nation that is so despised and so persecuted as the sons of Israel. So I followed your advice, and I joined their ranks, for I am certain that they will be elevated to a high estate some day."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TEN MARTYRS

1. *R. Ishmael the High Priest in Heaven*



ADRIAN decreed that the teaching of the Law be stopped in Israel, upon pain of death. He also decreed that ten of the great teachers of the Law be put to death.

When the Roman government ordered that those sages be killed, the colleagues of R. Ishmael, the high priest, said to him: "Ascend to heaven and find out if it was so ordained by the Holy One, blessed be His name."

R. Ishmael thereupon cleansed himself, put on his fringed garment and his phylacteries, and pronounced the Name of God. Immediately a strong gust of wind came and carried him up to heaven. There he was met by the Archangel Gabriel, who asked him: "Art thou Ishmael, the one of whom the Creator daily expresses His praise saying: 'I have one servant on earth who resembles the beauty of My features?'"

"I am he," replied R. Ishmael.

"For what purpose hast thou come up here?" inquired Gabriel.

"I came up here to find out if the decree against us has been sealed by the Holy One, Blessed be His name," replied R. Ishmael.

"Ishmael, my son," said Gabriel, "thus have I heard in the secret recesses of heaven: 'Ten of the sages of Israel are to be delivered for slaughter into the hands of the wicked government.'"

"For what reason?" inquired R. Ishmael.

"For the reason that Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers," replied Gabriel. "Because Divine Justice daily brings charges before the throne of Divine Majesty, saying: 'Hast Thou written in Thy Torah even as much a single dead letter? Lo, Thou hast written there that whoever steals a person and sells him into slavery, he must surely be put to death, and the fathers of the ten tribes have sold Joseph into slavery, and their children have not unto this day paid the penalty for this crime.' Therefore the decree was passed concerning the ten sages of Israel."

"Has God been unable heretofore to find any to be punished for the selling of Joseph, that He has had to wait for us?" asked R. Ishmael.

"Ishmael, my son," said Gabriel, "from the day on which the heads of the tribes have sold Joseph, God was unable to find in one generation ten men as righteous and as pious as the heads of the tribes, until you have come into existence; therefore he exacts punishment from you."

When Sammael, the angel of death, saw that God

was about to seal the decree against the ten sages, he rejoiced greatly, and he boasted: "Well, I was victorious over the Archangel Michael."

God was wroth with Sammael, and He said to Mattatron, the chief of the angels: "Write and seal a decree of perdition by brimstone and fire for wicked Rome."

Upon hearing this, R. Ishmael was somewhat pacified, and while he walked about in heaven, he noticed an altar near the throne of Divine Majesty, and he inquired of Gabriel: "What is this?"

"This is an altar," came the reply.

"And what do you sacrifice daily on this altar?" asked R. Ishmael.

"The lives of the righteous are sacrificed daily on this altar," said Gabriel.

"And who sacrifices them?" asked R. Ishmael.

"Michael, Israel's guardian angel, sacrifices them," replied Gabriel.

R. Ishmael at once descended to earth and related to his colleagues what he had heard in heaven. While on the one hand they grieved that such a terrible fate had been decreed for them, on the other hand they rejoiced that they were compared by God to the ten heads of the tribes.

2. The Death of R. Simeon ben Gamaliel and R. Ishmael

When R. Simeon ben Gamaliel and R. Ishmael the high priest were seized to be executed, R.

Simeon shed bitter tears. Thereupon R. Ishmael said to him: "Young man, in two steps you will be placed in the company of the righteous, and yet you are weeping!"

"But my heart goes out," said R. Simeon, "for I know not why I am to lose my life."

R. Ishmael said to R. Simeon: "In your lifetime, did it ever occur that some one came to you with a certain question of law, and you detained him until you drank your cup, put on your sandals or put on your mantle? The Torah said: 'If thou afflict them in any wise . . . I will kill you with the sword.' It is immaterial whether the affliction be a severe one or a light one."

"You have comforted me, master," said R. Simeon.

Both prisoners pleaded with the Roman executioner to be executed first. R. Ishmael said: "I am the high priest, the son of a high priest, and a descendant of Aaron the high priest; pray take my life first, so that my eyes see not the death of my colleague."

R. Simeon said: "I am the chief of the Sanhedrin, the son of a chief, and a descendant of King David. Pray take my life first, so that my eyes see not the death of my colleague."

"Then cast lots between you as to who shall be killed first," suggested the executioner.

The prisoners cast lots, and it fell in favor of R. Simeon ben Gamaliel that he be killed first.

Immediately the executioner drew his sword and cut off the head of R. Simeon. R. Ishmael seized the head, placed it on his lap, and wept and cried thus: "O holy mouth! O trustworthy mouth! O mouth that let fall beautiful gems! Where is the Torah and where is its reward?"

While R. Ishmael was thus mourning over R. Simeon, the daughter of the emperor looked out of the window of her palace, and she beheld the great beauty of R. Ishmael. He was one of the seven most handsome persons that existed on earth, and his face resembled that of an angel of God. She had pity on him, and she sent word to her father: "Pray, father, grant me one request."

The emperor sent back word to his daughter: "I will do anything you ask me to, except sparing the lives of Ishmael and his colleagues."

The princess petitioned: "Pray, save the life of Ishmael only."

"Your petition cannot be granted," replied the emperor, "for I have taken an oath regarding that."

The princess thereupon sent another plea to her father: "Pray order that his scalp be removed, so that I can use it as a mirror."

The heartless emperor ordered that the scalp of R. Ishmael be removed. When the place where R. Ishmael used to put on the phylacteries had been reached, he uttered a heartrending cry, and the heavens and earth trembled; he uttered another

heartrending cry, and the throne of Divine Majesty trembled. The ministering angels then gathered around the throne and said: "Master of the world! A righteous man like this, whom Thou hast shown all the treasures of the upper worlds, and to whom Thou hast revealed all the secrets of the nether worlds, shall he die such a horrible death? Is this the Torah and this its reward?"

"What can I do for My son," replied the Holy One, blessed be He, "it was so decreed by Me, and there is no one to annul the decree."

A heavenly voice was thereupon heard: "If I hear another outcry like this, I shall turn the world into chaos."

Upon hearing this heavenly voice, R. Ishmael became silent, and he was asked by the emperor: "Are you still confiding in your God?"

"Though he slay me, yet shall I trust in Him," came the reply of the martyr, and the soul of R. Ishmael immediately ascended to heaven.

3. *The Death of R. Akiba*

When the Roman emperor forbade the Jews to study the Torah, Pappus ben Judah found R. Akiba expounding the Torah to great multitudes. Pappus said: "Akiba, are you not at all afraid of the Roman government?"

R. Akiba said: "Are you Pappus, of whom people say that he is a wise man? In reality you are a fool! Let me tell you a parable: A fox

once walked along the bank of a river, and he looked into the water and saw fishes in flight. The fox said to the fishes: 'What are you running away from?' The fishes replied: 'We are running away from the nets that have been placed to trap us.' The fox said: 'Why then stay in the water and be afraid of the nets? Come upon dry land, and there we shall live in happiness and in peace, the same as our forefathers did.' Thereupon the fishes said to the fox: 'Are you the one that is reputed to be the wisest of all animals? In reality you are nothing but a fool! If we are afraid in the water, the element in which we live, then we surely will have cause to fear on dry land, where we cannot live at all.' The same is true of us. If we are afraid when we study the Torah, which is our life, how much more cause shall we have to fear the enemy when we cease to study the Torah!"

A few days after this incident, R. Akiba was seized by the Romans and put in prison. Pappus ben Judah was likewise put in prison, in the same cell with R. Akiba. The latter asked the former: "Pappus, who brought you here?"

"Happy is your lot, R. Akiba," replied Pappus, "that you were imprisoned because you studied the Torah. Woe to Pappus, that he was caught and imprisoned for absurdities and vanities."

Just as R. Akiba was about to be taken out for execution, the emperor was informed that the king of Arabia had invaded Roman territory. Hadrian

hurried away with his army to check the advance of the Arabian king, and he ordered the execution of R. Akiba to be postponed until after his return from the expedition.

Upon his returning from the war, Hadrian ordered that R. Akiba be executed. The executioners flayed the great rabbi with iron combs, and while they did so the martyr kept on reciting the verse: "The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He."

When they had finished flaying the martyr, it was time to recite the *Sh'ma*; and the disciples said in tears to their great teacher: "Are you bent on reciting the *Sh'ma* even now?"

"All my life I was praying for an opportunity to be able to give up my very life for the sake of God," said the martyr. "Now that it has come, shall I not fulfill it cheerfully?"

The martyr thereupon recited the *Sh'ma*: "*Shema Yisroel, adonai elohenu, adonai ehad.*" (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.) He prolonged the last word *ehad* until his soul ascended to heaven. Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying: "Happy art thou, Akiba, that thy soul departed while thou wert reciting the word *ehad*."

The ministering angels said to the Holy One, blessed be His name: "Master of the world, is this the Torah and this its reward?"

Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying: "Happy art thou, R. Akiba, for thou hast been chosen for bliss eternal."

The day on which R. Akiba died was the eve of the Day of Atonement. R. Joshua, the grits-dealer, who used to attend to the rabbi while in prison, had therefore gone home on that day to prepare for the fast.

Elijah appeared at the door of Joshua, and greeted him thus: "Peace be unto you, my teacher."

"Peace be unto you, my teacher and master," came the reply.

"Do you require any help?" inquired Elijah.

"Why, who are you?" asked R. Joshua.

"I am a priest," answered Elijah, "and I have come to tell you that R. Akiba died in prison to-day."

Elijah and R. Joshua hurried to the prison. They found the prison door unlocked, the guard of the prison and the prisoners all fast asleep. Elijah at once placed the body of R. Akiba on his shoulder and carried him out of prison.

Out of prison, R. Joshua said to Elijah: "Master, you told me that you were a priest, and a priest is not permitted to defile himself by contact with a dead body."

"Joshua, my son," said Elijah, "God forbid, scholars do not defile even when dead."

They carried the body of R. Akiba all night, until they reached Antipatris. When they arrived

there, they walked up three steps, and then went down three steps, and suddenly a cave opened for them. In the cave they saw a chair, a bench, a table and a candle-stick. There was also a bed there, and they placed the body of the martyr upon it and left the cave. As soon as they emerged into the open, the candle in the candle-stick lit of itself and the opening of the cave closed by itself. When Elijah saw all this he said: "Happy are ye, O ye righteous, happy are ye who study the Torah; happy are ye who are God-fearing; for a place is preserved for you in Paradise. Happy art thou, R. Akiba, that such a pleasant abode was procured for thee at thy death."

4. *The Death of Hananiah ben Teradion*

The sage R. Hananiah ben Teradion was a very pious man; he never spoke ill of any man, and he was beloved both by God and by men. When the Roman emperor decreed that the Jews must not study the Torah, this sage gathered disciples about him and taught them the Law.

Once, when R. Jose ben Kisma became ill, R. Hananiah came to visit him. The sick sage said: "Hananiah, my brother, do you not perceive that the Roman empire was appointed to rule us by a decree of Heaven? You see that it burned His Temple, it slew His pious men and destroyed His good men, and still it exists. Yet I am told that you disregard its edict, and that you teach the Law

in public gatherings, holding a Scroll of the Law on your lap!"

"They shall show mercy from Heaven," replied Hananiah.

"I am talking to you common sense," said R. Jose, "and you tell me: 'They shall show mercy from heaven.' I wonder if some day the Romans will not burn you together with the Scroll of the Law."

"Tell me, master," pleaded R. Hananiah, "will I have a share in the life eternal?"

"Why, have you committed any crime," asked the sick rabbi, "that you ask a question like this?"

"I did commit a crime," answered R. Hananiah. "You know, master, that I am treasurer of all charity funds. One day I took the money which was given to me to be expended for a Purim dinner for the poor, and by error I distributed it to the poor to be used for any purpose they saw fit. You well know, master, that one is not permitted to use charity money that is given for a particular purpose, for any other purpose."

"May my portion be like yours," said R. Jose, "and may my lot be like yours."

A few days later R. Jose ben Kisma died. Many high Roman officials attended the obsequies for the venerable sage. On the way back from the funeral, the Roman officers saw R. Hananiah standing in the midst of a multitude and teaching the Law to them. The Roman officers ordered

that the rabbi be burned alive, and that his wife, too, be put to death.

When he was taken out to be executed, he was wrapped in a Scroll of the Law, and surrounded with bundles of straw which were set on fire. The executioners took tufts of wool, soaked them in water, and put them on the breast of the victim, so that he should not expire quickly but die by slow degrees.

"Is this your reward for studying the Torah?" asked the daughter of the martyr.

"If I were burned by myself," said the slowly dying martyr, "it would be very hard on me. But since I am being burned together with a Scroll of the Law, then He who will resent the insult heaped upon the Law, will also resent the insult heaped upon me."

The disciples who gathered around their dying master said: "Master, what do you behold now?"

"I see the parchment of the Scroll burning in the fire," answered the dying sage, "but the letters of the Scroll are flying to heaven."

"Why do you not open your mouth, so that the flame may enter your mouth and hasten your end?" asked the disciples.

"It is best that He who gave the soul should reclaim it," replied R. Hananiah, "and let none take his life with his own hands."

"If I increase the flame and remove the tufts of wool from your chest, so that you may die sooner,"

asked the executioner of the dying rabbi, "will you procure me admittance into the world to come?"

"Yes, I will procure you such admittance," answered the martyr.

"Then swear to me," said the executioner.

R. Hananiah complied with the request of the executioner, who thereupon increased the flame and removed the wet tufts of wool from the chest of the rabbi. The soul of R. Hananiah at once flew heavenward. Then the executioner threw himself into the fire and was consumed by it. A heavenly voice was then heard saying: "Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradion and his executioner have been chosen for bliss everlasting."

5. *The Death of R. Judah b. Baba and R. Judah b. Dama*

Once the Roman government decreed that no more rabbis be ordained in Israel. The penalty for the violation of this would be the death of the one who ordains, the death of those ordained, and the death to all the inhabitants of the town where the rabbis were ordained.

What did R. Juda ben Baba do? He placed himself somewhere between two big mountains, and he ordained five sages: R. Meir, R. Judah, R. Simeon, R. Jose and R. Elazar b. Shamua. When they were discovered by the Romans, the aged rabbi said to those whom he had ordained: "My sons, run for your lives."

"What about you?" asked the newly ordained rabbis.

"I am too old to flee," replied R. Judah.

Before the aged rabbi had an opportunity to move away from his place, the Romans thrust into his body three hundred iron spear-heads, and his body was riddled like a sieve.

The day on which R. Judah ben Dama was taken out from prison to be executed was the day before the Feast of Weeks. R. Judah pleaded with the emperor: "Pray postpone my execution until I am able to welcome the holiday and thank God for having given us His Law."

"Do you still confide in the Law and in the God who has given it to you?" wondered the emperor.

"Yes, I do," was the reply.

"What reward can you expect for fulfilling the commandments of the Law?" inquired the emperor.

The prisoner replied: "Concerning those who fulfil the will of God, King David, of blessed memory, said: 'Oh, how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee.'"

"There is no one in the world as foolish as you who believe that there is another world besides the one we live in," said the emperor.

"There are no fools in the world who can be compared to you who deny the existence of the

living God," said R. Judah. "Woe be your portion and great will be your discomfiture when you behold us enjoying the life everlasting, while you must descend to the lowest depths of the Gehenna."

Enraged at the bold reply of the prisoner, the emperor ordered that the hair on the head of the aged rabbi be tied to the mane of a horse and dragged through all the streets of Rome. This done, the emperor ordered that the body of the sage be cut limb by limb.

Elijah, of blessed memory, came, gathered together all the limbs of the martyr, and buried them in a cave near a certain river that flows not far from Rome. For thirty days, the Romans heard sounds of wailing and weeping come out of the cave. The matter was reported to the emperor, but he said: "Even if the whole world be turned to chaos, I will not rest until I have executed my decree against those sages."

6. *The Death of R. Hutspith and R. Hananiah ben Hakhinai*

When R. Hutspith was taken out of prison to be executed, he was one hundred and thirty years old. He was very shapely in figure and prepossessing in appearance, resembling the very angels of God. The Roman high officials, moved by the beauty and the age of the prisoner, said to the emperor: "O sire, have pity on this old man."

The emperor thereupon said to the aged prisoner: "How old are you?"

"I am one hundred and thirty years old less one day," replied R. Hutspith. "Pray permit me to live one more day."

"What difference does it make to you, whether you die to-day or you die to-morrow?" asked the emperor.

"Because I wish to fulfil two more precepts," replied the aged rabbi.

"What precepts would you like to fulfil?" asked the emperor.

"I would like to recite the *Sh'ma* this evening and to-morrow morning," replied R. Hutspith; "for I wish to acknowledge the overlordship of the proper, great and fearful Name."

"O you stiff-necked people!" cried out the emperor. "How long will you confide in your God? Lo, He is old at this time, and He is powerless to save you from my hand. If He still had the power, He would surely avenge Himself, His people, and His house on me, as He has done in the case of Pharaoh, Sisera and all the other kings of Canaan."

Upon hearing this blasphemy uttered by the haughty emperor, the aged rabbi rent his garments and wept aloud, and turning to the emperor, he said: "What will you do in the end when the Almighty will punish Rome and your gods?"

"How much longer will I stay here and dispute

with him?" exclaimed the emperor. "Hand him over to the executioner!"

The next sage to be executed was Hananiah ben Hakhinai, who was ninety-five years old. From the age of twelve until the end of his days he fasted every weekday. The day on which he was to be executed was Friday, and his disciples said to him: "Master, would you not taste any food before you die?"

"Until this very day I have fasted and have tasted no food," said R. Hananiah, "and this day when I do not know upon which road I am to go, you want to me to taste food?"

While this sage was being executed, he began to recite the Biblical verses relating to the Sabbath: "And the heaven and the earth were finished." And just as he finished reciting the words, "And He sanctified it," his soul departed. A heavenly voice was then heard saying: "Happy art thou, R. Hananiah, who wast holy, and whose soul departed while thou wast speaking of holiness."

7. The Death of R. Yeshebab and R. Eliezer ben Shamua

When R. Yeshebab, the Scribe, was taken out of prison by the executioner, his disciples asked: "Master, what will be the fate of the Law in the future?"

"My sons," answered the rabbi, "the Law is

bound to be forgotten in the future, because this wicked government has become insolent and devised ways and means to blot out our precious treasure from our midst. O that my death were an atonement for this generation! But I see that there is not a street in Rome where one slain by the sword cannot be found; that this wicked nation is bent upon shedding more blood in Israel."

"Master, what will be our end?" asked the disciples.

"Encourage one another, and love peace and justice," advised the aged master; "perhaps there is still some hope left for you."

The emperor then said to the aged sage: "Old man, how old are you?"

"I am ninety years old this day," replied R. Yeshebab. "But before I was even born, the Holy One, blessed be His name, had decreed that my colleagues and I be delivered into your hands to be killed. But the Holy One, blessed be His name, will some day demand our blood from your hand."

"Lose no time and kill this man, too," commanded the emperor, "and let us behold the might and power of his God."

The emperor then ordered that the sage be burned alive.

The tenth and the last to be executed was R. Eliezer ben Shamua, who was one hundred and

five years old. This venerable sage had never indulged in frivolity, nor quarreled with any man. He was of a very meek and humble disposition. For eighty years of his life he fasted.

The day on which he was to be executed was the Day of Atonement, and his disciples said to him: "Master, what do you see?"

"I see," said the rabbi, "the biers of R. Judah ben Baba and R. Akiba ben Joseph being carried alongside each other, and the two sages dispute about some legal question."

"Who compromises between them?" asked the disciples.

"R. Ishmael, the high priest, acts as harmonizer between them," answered R. Eliezer.

"And whose opinion prevails?" asked the disciples.

"That of R. Akiba," answered R. Eliezer, "because he exerted himself to the utmost to know the Law." And the rabbi continued to relate to his disciples: "I see also that the soul of every righteous man purifies itself in the waters of Siloah, in order to be admitted to-day, in a clean state, into the heavenly college to hear the explanations of R. Akiba concerning the laws of the day. Angels are busy bringing golden chairs for the righteous to sit upon."

In the meantime the emperor ordered that R. Eliezer be handed over to the executioner. A

heavenly voice was thereupon heard saying:
“Happy art thou, Eliezer, who wast pure when
alive, and whose soul departed when thou wast in
a clean state.”

CHAPTER XXIV

RABBI JOSE THE GALILEAN

1. *A Bad Woman*



ONE of the great sages who lived in the time of R. Akiba was R. Jose the Galilean. Many disciples from all over the country flocked to learn his wisdom from him. But the wife of Jose was malicious and quarrelsome, and she very often insulted the sage in the presence of his disciples. Rabbi Jose, who was famed for his piety, would never answer his wife, but would bear her insults in silence.

One day, when the wife of the rabbi entered the room in the middle of a lecture and began heaping insults upon him, as was her custom, the disciples said: "Master, why not give her a divorce, and free yourself from humiliation at her hands?"

"I am unable to divorce her," answered the rabbi, "for according to the terms of our marriage agreement, I am bound to give her a large sum of money in case of divorce."

Many days afterward R. Elazar ben Azariah came to the house of R. Jose to discuss with him

some questions of law. At the end of the discussions, R. Jose invited his guest to his house for a meal. R. Eliezer accepted the invitation, and together with R. Jose they entered the dining room.

The wife of R. Jose, who hated the sight of scholars, lowered her head upon seeing the distinguished guest come in. R. Jose thereupon looked into the pot that was on the oven, and he asked of his wife: "Pray tell me is there anything to eat in this pot?"

"There is nothing in there but mash," answered his wife, grumbling and without even raising her head.

When R. Jose emptied the pot into a dish on the table, he found that the pot was full of young birds. R. Eliezer, seeing that the wife of the pious rabbi was malicious and quarrelsome, said to R. Jose when they were seated at the table: "Your wife said that there was nothing but mash, and now it has been changed into young chickens."

"Indeed, a miracle must have happened," replied R. Jose.

Their meal over, R. Eliezer said to R. Jose: "Why do you not divorce your wife, who treats you ill, and marry another one?"

"I am unable to do so," replied R. Jose, "because I have not the money I am required to give her under our marriage agreement."

"I will provide you with the necessary sum of

money," said R. Eliezer, "but do give her a divorce."

R. Jose accordingly divorced his wife, and gave her a very large sum of money, as had been stipulated in their marriage contract.

2. *R. Jose's Magnanimity*

The money which the former wife of R. Jose had received was soon spent by her and she was forced to become the wife of the town watchman. After some time her husband became ill, lost all the money he had, and in addition became blind. To support himself and his wife, he went around begging alms through the streets of the town, his wife leading him by the hand.

Day after day, the woman would lead her blind husband through all the streets of the town, but when she came to the neighborhood of her former husband R. Jose she turned back.

One day, her blind husband, familiar with the localities of the town, said to his wife: "Why do you abstain from taking me into the house of R. Jose, who is very charitable?"

"Since I have been divorced by him," answered the woman, "I cannot very well approach him and ask him for alms."

Once the blind man and his wife went through many streets and received no alms. When they came to the neighborhood of R. Jose, his wife again was about to turn back. The blind man became

angry and said: "This time you must take me into his house, for otherwise both of us shall starve."

She led her husband to the front of her former house, but she refused to go in. "You must go in," insisted the blind man, and he began to beat her.

A crowd immediately gathered and mocked at the couple. R. Jose looked out of the window to find out the cause of the tumult, and to his grief he saw his former wife being beaten by her husband.

"Why do you beat your wife?" inquired R. Jose of the blind man.

"Because she deprives me of an income," answered the blind man. "Whenever she comes to this neighborhood, she refuses to go about begging, and because of that we have not enough to live on."

R. Jose thereupon provided the couple with a house to live in, and he also gave them enough for a living so that they should not have to go about begging. From that day on the blind man no longer beat his wife.

Nevertheless people heard the woman say one night: "I would rather be beaten by my blind husband than suffer the humiliation of being supported by my former husband."

CHAPTER XXV

RABBI MEIR; ELISHA BEN ABUYAH

1. *The Miraculous Escape*



ONE of the most renowned disciples of R. Akiba was R. Meir. His real name was Mosheh, but he was named Meir ("illuminator") because he enlightened his generation with his great erudition.

R. Meir was a skilful scribe, and he used to earn three salas a week. With one sala he supported himself and his family; another sala he spent for clothing himself and his family, and the third sala he gave away for the support of the poor students. One day his disciples said to him: "Master, who will provide for your children, when you spend thus all your earnings?"

"If my children will grow up to be righteous men," replied the sage, "then the words of King David will be true of them: 'I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.' If they will not be righteous men, why should I leave my earnings for those who are hated by the Almighty?"

R. Meir was a favorite disciple of R. Akiba, and

the latter tells of a little incident that had happened to the former.

"Once," relates R. Akiba, "I was aboard a sea-going vessel, and I saw another vessel which was tossed about in the sea and then it sank. I was very much worried over the fate of a scholar who was traveling in the sinking vessel, all the passengers of which were drowned. This scholar was none other than R. Meir.

"Some time after this occurrence, when I arrived in Cappadocia, in Asia Minor, many disciples came to discuss the law with me. I noticed, to my great surprise and pleasure, that R. Meir was sitting among those assembled, and decided some questions of law.

"So I said to him: 'My son, who brought you up from the ocean?'

"He replied: 'Master, the mighty billows of the ocean have saved me from drowning. They tossed me about, from billow to billow, until they deposited me safely upon the shore. And here I am now.'

2. *"My Brother Ki Tob"*

In the south there was a certain inn-keeper who, in the middle of the night, used to wake up those who would come to his inn for shelter, and say to them: "Come, I will accompany you on the road, so that you may have a safe departure." Once on the road, robbers would attack the innocent stran-

gers and rob them of all they had. These robbers would then share the loot with the inn-keeper.

Once R. Meir traveled on that road, and when night was about to fall, he entered the inn owned by the robber. In the middle of the night, the inn-keeper put on his clothes, woke up R. Meir who was fast asleep, and said to him: "Go on your road, and I will accompany you, so that you may have a safe voyage."

"I cannot go now," replied R. Meir, "because I have a brother in this vicinity, and I expect him here soon. I cannot leave without him."

"Where is your brother?" inquired the inn-keeper, who did not like to see R. Meir get away with all his possessions safely.

"My brother is in the synagogue," replied R. Meir.

"Tell me his name," said the anxious inn-keeper, "so that I may go there and call him."

"My brother's name is Ki Tob," replied the rabbi.

The inn-keeper at once went to the synagogue. All night he stood at the gate of the synagogue and shouted: "Ki Tob! Ki Tob!" But there was no answer. Disappointed, the robber returned home, early in the morning. He noticed R. Meir getting ready to depart, and he asked: "Where is your brother that you had spoken to me about?"

"My brother has come already," replied the rabbi.



In the middle of the night the inn-keeper woke up Rabbi Meir

"Where is he?" asked the inn-keeper.

"I told you that my brother's name was Ki Tob," replied the rabbi. "Now he is here and you can see him all over. When God created the light, He looked at it and he saw that it was good (*Ki Tob*). Light is my brother when I am on the road; without it I do not travel."

3. *The Fox and the Wolf*

R. Meir gained great fame not only for his great wisdom and learning, but also for his fables. It is said of him that he had three hundred fables about foxes, but only one of them has been preserved:

"Once the wolf complained to the fox: 'I am very hungry, for I have not tasted any food for a long time. Do you perhaps know where I can get some food to satisfy my appetite?'

"'O yes, I know where you can get food,' said the sly fox. 'But you cannot get your food for nothing, you must earn it. Now, to-day is Friday, and the Jews are very busy preparing food for their Sabbath. Go into any one of the court-yards in the town and help the owner of that house prepare the food for the Sabbath, then he will give you something to eat.'

"The wolf followed the advice of the fox and entered the yard of one of the houses in town. As soon as the neighbors beheld the wolf, they began to cry out: 'Wolf! Wolf!' All the neighbors,

men, women and children came running with sticks and stones and belabored the poor wolf, who beat a hasty retreat to the forest.

"'What has happened to you?' asked the fox of the dejected wolf. 'Did you not get any food?'

"'Instead of food they belabored me with sticks and stones,' said the angry wolf. 'Now I am hungry, and to satisfy my hunger, I am going to eat you up.'

"'I did not advise you wrongly,' said the fox. 'The Jews are kind to everybody, and give everybody food and shelter. They belabored you with sticks and stones, not because they hate you, but because your father had once wronged them. One day, when your father was hungry, he, too, went to one of the houses of the Jews and offered to help the owner prepare food for the Sabbath. The owner of the house permitted your father to go into the house to help him prepare the food. But your father was not fair to the owner; he ate up all the best food himself, leaving only the common food for the owner. Remembering your father's actions, they now chased you away from their houses with sticks and stones.'

"'Is that true?' said the wolf. 'So I was punished for the sins of my father!'

"'Yes,' said the sly fox, 'you were punished for nothing else but the sins of your father. But come with me now!' continued the fox, 'and I will show

you a place where to get food enough to satisfy your hunger.'

"The hungry wolf followed the fox, until they reached a well, on the top of which there was a beam to which were attached two buckets. The fox got into one of the buckets, which was lowered to the bottom of the well by the weight of the fox.

"'Where are you going?' shouted out the wolf who stood near the top of the well.

"'I want to go to the bottom of the well,' said the fox. 'There is plenty of meat and cheese to be had down here. You see that big round cheese at the bottom of the well,' said the fox pointing to the reflection of the moon in the water of the well. 'Come down with me and we will have a fine feast down here.'

"'How can I get there?' asked the hungry wolf.

"'You just get into the other bucket which is on the top of the well now,' advised the fox, who was at the bottom of the well.

"The wolf got into the other bucket, and he, being heavier than the fox, went to the bottom of the well, while the bucket where the fox was came up to the top. 'How will I be able to get out of here?' inquired the suspicious wolf.

"'You need not get out of there,' said the fox, 'for, "The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead."' "

4. *A Deposit Must Be Returned*

R. Meir had a learned wife whose name was B'ruryah, daughter of R. Hananiah ben Teradion the martyr. B'ruryah had borne R. Meir two sons whom they loved dearly.

Once a pestilence broke out in the city, and one Sabbath afternoon, while R. Meir was at college expounding the Law to his disciples, his two sons suddenly died. The mother placed her two dead children in bed and covered them up with a sheet.

In the evening, when R. Meir returned from the college, he said to his wife: "Where are the children?"

"They have gone to college," answered B'ruryah.

"I looked around for them there," said R. Meir, somewhat worried, "but I was not able to find them."

The pious and learned wife made no reply, but she handed him a cup of wine over which he pronounced the prescribed benediction that marks the end of the Sabbath. When he had finished the benediction, he asked again: "Where can the children be?"

"Sometimes they go to visit their friends," replied B'ruryah; "I suppose they will come home soon."

B'ruryah set the table for her learned husband, and after supper, she said: "Master, I have a question of law to ask you."

"What is it?" asked the rabbi in astonishment.

"Some time ago," said the learned woman, "a man came here and entrusted something valuable into my care. Now he has come to demand it back. Must I return it to him?"

"My daughter," said the rabbi, more puzzled than before; "must not one return a deposit to the rightful owner? Why ask a question like that?"

"I did not want to return it to the owner without your knowledge," replied B'ruryah, with an air of unconcern.

Thereupon she took her learned husband by his hand and led him upstairs into the room where her two dead sons lay covered. The mother uncovered the two dead bodies in full view of her husband, who broke into bitter lamentations: "Alas, my dear sons, the very light of my eyes!"

B'ruryah shed no tears, and calmly said to her deeply depressed husband: "Did you not tell me a little while ago that we are obliged to return a deposit to the rightful owner when he demands it? 'God gave and God hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

R. Meir looked at his wife, and, embarrassed by her composure, he no longer shed tears over the loss of his sons.

5. *Elisha ben Abuyah*

R. Meir learned much of his wisdom from a prominent scholar, Elisha ben Abuyah, whose

nickname was Aher (apostate), because he had become an infidel.

Abuyah, the father of Elisha, was a prominent man. On the day his newly-born Elisha was to be circumcised, Abuyah made a feast to which he invited all the great men of Jerusalem, including R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus and R. Joshua ben Hanina. During the course of the meal some of the guests chanted hymns, while others sang some Grecian songs.

Thereupon R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua: "While these men are engaged in singing, should we not occupy ourselves with the study of the Torah?"

These two great rabbis thereupon began to expound portions of the Pentateuch, Prophets and the Writings. Their words brought joy to the hearts of all those that were assembled, and they were surrounded by a flame of fire. The host, Abuyah, then said: "Since the power of the Torah is so great, this newly-born son, if he lives, shall devote his life to the study of the Torah."

Elisha did become a great scholar, but because his father had made his vow not for the sake of Heaven, but for the sake of glory, wisdom did not linger with Elisha.

One day, as Elisha was studying in the valley of Gennesar, he saw a man commit a double crime with immunity. The stranger climbed to the top of a tree on the Sabbath, and took the dam with the

young birds from the nest which was on the top of the tree. Yet this violator of the law descended the tree without mishap.

On a weekday Elisha again saw a man climb up to the top of a tree on which there was a nest. The man complied with the law of God and let the dam go and took the little birds for himself. Upon descending the tree, the man was bitten by a serpent, as a result of which he died. Elisha then said: "Where is the promise of God? Did He not say: 'Thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days?' Where then is the reward of this man, and where is the prolongation of his life?"

On another day, Elisha saw a pig drag along the tongue of R. Huspith, who had been put to death by the Roman emperor. Elisha then said: "Oh, that the mouth which gave forth pearls must now lick dust!"

Elisha thereupon became an infidel, but R. Meir did not desist from associating with his former teacher, although he was rebuked for it many times.

6. *Elisha Refuses to Repent*

One Sabbath day, while R. Meir was lecturing at the college in Tiberias in Galilee, his teacher Elisha was riding a horse. When R. Meir was informed that Elisha was in the market place, he

went out to meet him. In the course of their conversation, Elisha said to R. Meir: "Your teacher R. Akiba once said: 'Why is the Torah compared to gold vessels? Because just as gold vessels can be mended when they break, so is it true of the one who studies the Torah, that although he sinned, yet he has a remedy.'"

"You, too, then, repent," urged R. Meir.

"I can no longer repent," answered the infidel.

"Why not?" asked R. Meir.

"Once," related Elisha, "I was riding a horse on the Day of Atonement which occurred on the Sabbath. I rode behind a synagogue, when I heard a voice from heaven proclaim: 'Return ye backsliding children, return to Me and I will return to you; only Aher cannot return, since he was aware of My power and yet he rebelled against Me.'"

When the two had walked a distance of two thousand cubits from the town which is as far as one may walk on the Sabbath, Elisha said to R. Meir: "Return, for I estimate by the footsteps of my horse that this is the Sabbath limit."

"O Elisha, my master," pleaded R. Meir, "you tell me to return, why should not you too return to us?"

"Meir," said Elisha, "I have already told you of the announcement I had heard made from heaven that Aher can no longer return."

Elisha then took hold of R. Meir's arm and said

to him: "Come with me to town, and I will prove to you, that I can no longer repent."

When the two reached the first synagogue, Elisha said to a little boy: "Recite to me, youngster, the latest Biblical verse you have learned."

"The latest verse I have learned," said the little fellow, is: 'There is no peace, said the Lord, concerning the wicked!'"

The two then went to a second synagogue, and there again Elisha said to the first little boy he had met: "Little fellow, recite to me the Biblical verse you have recently learned."

The little boy replied: "What I have recently learned in school, is: 'For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me.'"

Into thirteen synagogues did Elisha and R. Meir enter, and in each one Elisha requested the first youngster he met to recite to him some Biblical verse. And each verse recited by the youngsters boded evil to Elisha, and informed him that there was no salvation left for him. When the last of the youngsters was requested to recite the latest verse of the Bible he had learned, he recited: "But unto the wicked (*velarasha*) God saith: 'What hast thou to do to declare My statutes?'"

The little boy was stammering and when he pronounced the word *velarasha* it sounded as though he had said *v'le Elisha*. This provoked the anger of Elisha, and he said to R. Meir: "If I only

had a knife with me, I would cut this youngster to pieces."

7. *Death of Elisha*

Some time afterwards, Elisha fell very sick. People came and said to R. Meir: "Your master Elisha is very ill."

R. Meir thereupon went to the bedside of his sick master, and he said to him: "Master, repent."

"Do you think that my repentance will be acceptable even now, at the mouth of the grave?" asked the sick Elisha.

"It certainly will be accepted even now," said R. Meir.

Elisha made no reply to the words of R. Meir, but wept and breathed his last. R. Meir rejoiced and he said: "Methinks that my master died while repenting."

But when Aher was put into his grave, a fire came down from heaven to burn his grave so that no remnant might be left of it. R. Meir was informed: "The grave of your master is burning."

R. Meir immediately went to the grave, and having spread his mantle over the grave, he said: "If the Almighty refuses to redeem you, wait until I join you in the world to come, and I will redeem you."

The fire was immediately extinguished, but it was decided in the heavenly court that the soul of Elisha should neither be taken to account nor

should it ever be admitted into the life of eternal bliss. It was said: "Elisha should not be judged, because he was a great scholar of the Torah during his lifetime, and he should not enjoy the bliss eternal because of his sins."

Thereupon R. Meir said: "It were better that my master be judged and punished for his sins, for after he had atoned for his sins he would have a share in the life of everlasting bliss. When I die, I shall cause smoke to come out of his grave."

When R. Meir died, smoke was seen coming out from the grave of Elisha. In later generations there lived a certain sage by the name of R. Johanan, and he said: "That was indeed showing some superiority to burn his master! Upon my death, I shall cause the smoke to cease coming up from the grave of Elisha."

Upon the death of R. Johanan, the smoke ceased coming up from the grave of the infidel.

8. *R. Meir Flees to Babylon*

R. Hananiah ben Teradion, who was burned alive by the Romans, had two daughters. One, B'ruryah, became the wife of R. Meir, and the other one was led away into captivity.

One day B'ruryah said to her husband: "It is a great shame for us that my sister should remain in captivity."

"I will do my utmost to redeem her," replied R. Meir.

R. Meir took a tarkab (a certain measure) full of golden coins and left for the town where his sister-in-law was located. Upon reaching the prison where the maiden was held captive, the sage said to the keeper: "Set that girl free."

"I will forfeit my head to the government if I do that," replied the keeper of the prison.

"Here is a tarkab full of gold coins," said R. Meir; "half of this you can spend in bribes to the Roman officials, and the other half you can keep for yourself."

"What will I do when I have spent all the gold?" asked the keeper.

"On any occasion, when in trouble," replied R. Meir, "say: 'O God of Meir, help me,' and you will be saved."

"How can you prove to me, that what you say is true?" asked the keeper.

In the prison-yard there were two dogs tied on two chains. R. Meir said to the keeper: "Are these dogs ferocious?"

"They are very ferocious," replied the keeper. "Should anybody dare tease them when loose, they would tear him to pieces."

"Then let them loose," said R. Meir, "and I will prove to you that I am telling you the truth."

When the dogs were let loose, R. Meir threw some earth at them. The ferocious dogs jumped at him ready to tear him to pieces. But R. Meir uttered the words: "God of Meir, help me," and

the dogs became tame. Assured by this incident, the keeper of the prison freed the sister-in-law of R. Meir.

Shortly afterwards the Roman emperor was informed that the keeper had set the fair captive free, and the culprit was put to trial, found guilty and sentenced to die on the gallows. When the prisoner was led to the gallows, he uttered the words: "God of Meir, help me."

"What are you talking about?" asked the executioners.

The prisoner told the executioners of what had happened, and they led him before the emperor. The emperor ordered that the picture of R. Meir be hung on the gate of Rome, and that the following be written underneath: "Any one who finds this person shall seize him forthwith and deliver him up to the authorities."

In order to escape the wrath of the Roman emperor, R. Meir was forced to flee to Babylon.

CHAPTER XXVI

RABBI SIMEON BEN YOHAI

1. *Thirteen Years in a Cave*



ONE of the greatest rabbis of that age was R. Simeon ben Yohai. One day R. Simeon and two other sages, R. Jose and R. Judah, were discussing certain matters, and R. Judah said: "The Romans certainly accomplish useful things. They build bridges, they construct bath-houses, and many other needful things."

R. Jose made no comment and remained silent, but R. Simeon said: "Everything they do is from selfish motives. They build bath-houses, for the purpose of deriving pleasure from it; they construct bridges, in order to collect tolls. They do nothing for the sake of humanity."

A certain Judah, a descendant of proselytes, happened to be present and he overheard this conversation. This Judah spread this conversation abroad, until it reached the Roman officials. The Roman emperor thereupon decreed: "Judah, who spoke well of the Roman government, shall be promoted to an office; Jose, who kept silent, shall be

exiled to Sephoris, and Simeon, who had spoken ill of the government, shall be put to death."

When this decree reached the ear of R. Simeon, he and his son R. Elazar hid in a house of study. Every day his wife would bring them a loaf of bread and a jug of water. But when the Romans began to search for him, R. Simeon said to his son: "Women are fickle-minded; it is possible, when the Roman officials begin to torture her, that she will disclose our hiding place to them."

So the father and son went into a cave and there stayed in hiding, away even from the sight of their only friend who used to provide them with food and water. Where were they to obtain food and water? But these two men were saints, and deserved that God work a miracle for them. In the midst of the cave there suddenly sprang up a carob-tree laden with fruit, and a spring of fresh water. But they were also concerned about their clothes. What were they going to do when the only clothes they had on their bodies would wear away? So to preserve their clothes, they stripped them off, and covered their bodies up to their necks with sand. "When we are able to go out of the cave some day," they said, "we shall have clothes to put on in which to appear in town."

2. *Out of the Cave*

For twelve years R. Simeon and his son stayed in the cave, living on the carobs produced by the

carob-tree, drinking fresh water from the spring, and studying the Torah. At the end of twelve years, the Prophet Elijah stood at the entrance of the cave and said: "Who will inform ben-Yohai that the emperor has died and that his decree has become null and void?"

Thereupon R. Simeon and his son left the cave. When they beheld people occupied with plowing and sowing, they said: "People abandon the study of the Torah which gives everlasting life, and occupy themselves with things that give temporary life."

The glance of the two cavemen was so piercing that whatever they looked upon was reduced to ashes. Thereupon a heavenly voice called out: "Have ye come out of the cave to destroy My world? Return to your cave!"

R. Simeon and his son went back to the cave, where they have stayed twelve months. Then both of them complained and said: "Even the wicked in Gehenna suffer their punishment no longer than twelve months. Should we have to endure punishment longer?"

Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard again, saying: "Leave the cave!"

It was on a Friday that father and son left the cave, and they saw an old man running and carrying two bundles of fresh myrtle-branches. They inquired: "To what purpose do you carry these bundles?"

"To decorate my house with them in honor of the Sabbath," replied the old man.

"Would not one bunch be sufficient for you?" asked R. Simeon and his son.

"When the Holy One, blessed be His name, commanded us concerning the Sabbath," said the old man, "He used two words, *Shamor* (observe) and *Zakhor* (remember), so the two bunches are to commemorate the two words of God."

"See how dear the commandments are to the hearts of the children of Israel," remarked R. Simeon to his son.

Phinehas ben Jair, the son-in-law of R. Simeon, came out to meet the two cavemen. He took his father-in-law to the baths of Tiberias to wash and anoint his body. R. Phinehas noticed that the body of his father-in-law was covered with cuts from sitting in the sand while in the cave, and he began to weep, and the tears rolled on the wounds of R. Simeon's body and caused great pain. "Woe to me that I see you in a condition like this!" exclaimed R. Phinehas ben Jair.

"Happy am I that I am in a condition like this," replied R. Simeon, "for otherwise I would not have been able to acquire knowledge."

R. Simeon thereupon went out into the market-place, and there he met Judah the descendant of proselytes. He said: "Is this man still alive!" He looked at him with his piercing glance, and Judah was turned into a heap of bones.

3. *A Demon's Aid*

The Roman government once decreed that the Jews should not observe their Sabbath and should not circumcise their children. A certain man, whose name was R. Reuben ben Istrobli, said: "I will go to Rome and bring about the repeal of this evil decree."

Accordingly he went to Rome, trimmed his hair like a fringe on the forehead and let the curls hang down on the temples, according to the fashion of the Romans. He then went and mingled with the high Roman officials, and one day he said to them: "If one has an enemy, would he like to see his enemy rich or poor?"

"One would certainly like to see his enemy poor, not rich," replied the Roman officials.

"Why then do you forbid the Jews to observe their Sabbath?" argued R. Reuben. "On the contrary, let them observe as many Sabbaths as they please, so that they may become impoverished."

"You are certainly right," agreed the Roman officials.

Thereupon the latter induced the emperor to revoke his decree forbidding the Jews to observe their Sabbath.

At another time, Reuben said to the Roman officials: "If one have an enemy, would he like him to be healthy or weak and sickly?"

"One would certainly prefer to see his enemy weak and sickly," replied the officials.

"If the Jews are your enemies," argued Reuben, "why then do you not permit them to circumcise their children? Let them do that so that their children lose blood when young, and they will grow up to be weak and sickly men."

The Roman officials again agreed with Reuben, and induced the emperor to revoke also his decree forbidding the Jews to circumcise their children.

Some time afterward the officials found out that their friend Reuben was a Jew, and they induced the emperor to put his former decrees against the Jews in force again.

The Jews thereupon decided to send a delegation at Rome to ask the emperor to revoke his decrees. They asked one another: "Who shall go on this important errand?" And unanimously they decided that R. Simeon ben Yohai should go, because he was accustomed to have miracles performed for his sake.

"Who should go with him?" was the next question the Jews asked one another. And they decided that R. Elazar ben Jose should go with him. R. Jose was unwilling to permit his son to go with R. Simeon. "If my son displeases R. Simeon on the way," argued R. Jose, "he is liable to punish him. So I am willing to go instead of my son."

"I promise not to punish your son," said R. Simeon. R. Jose thereupon permitted his son to join R. Simeon.

When on the ship bound for Rome, some one asked R. Simeon a certain question. R. Elazar did not wait for R. Simeon to answer the question, but himself gave the answer in an undertone. Thereupon R. Simeon said: "From your whisper it is evident that you are a scholar. May the son not return to his father."

R. Elazar was immediately stricken with the croup, and he lay on the deck of the ship in a dying condition. R. Simeon, mindful of his promise to R. Jose that he would not cause harm to his son, now prayed to God that He heal the youthful sage. A few minutes passed, and one of the sailors who happened to pass by the dying sage, unintentionally stepped on the neck of R. Elazar. The sailor was immediately stricken with the croup, and R. Elazar became well again.

When R. Simeon and R. Elazar were nearing Rome, a demon appeared to them and said: "If it is your wish, I will accompany you to the palace of the Roman emperor and help you out."

R. Simeon wept and said to himself: "The bondmaid of our Patriarch Abraham deserved that an angel appear to her three times to help her out, and we do not deserve that an angel should appear to us even once. But, whatever the means, let a miracle be performed through them."

"Accompany us," said R. Simeon aloud to the demon.

"I will not go with you," said the demon to R. Simeon. "I will go ahead of you, and I will enter the body of the emperor's daughter, and make her insane. The most noted physicians will be invited to the palace, but they will be unable to cure the princess. When you arrive at the palace, you will tell me to get out, and I will obey you. The emperor will then award you by recalling his decrees against the Jews. And you will know that I have left the body of the princess, when all the glassware in the room will suddenly break."

The demon at once entered the body of the emperor's daughter, and she suddenly began to talk nonsense as though bereft of her senses. The emperor summoned the best physicians to the palace to cure her, but in vain. The princess could not be cured. Several weeks passed thus, and finally R. Simeon and his companion arrived at the palace. R. Simeon saw at once that everybody in the palace was in great distress.

"What is the cause of this distress?" asked the rabbi of the courtiers.

"The beloved princess of the emperor has suddenly become bereft of her mind," answered the courtiers. "There is no physician in the land that is able to save her. The emperor has summoned them all, but they could do nothing for the unfortunate princess."

"I will cure the princess," said R. Simeon.

When brought into the presence of the emperor and his princess, R. Simeon said to the demon: "Come out! come out!"

Immediately there was heard the sound of glasses breaking in the room, and R. Simeon knew that the demon had come out of the princess. The emperor's daughter at once regained her senses, and the delighted emperor said to R. Simeon and his companion: "Go to my treasury and take whatever you please."

Upon entering the treasury of the emperor, R. Simeon and his companion found the written decrees concerning the Jews. They took them and tore them to pieces. Thus were the evil decrees against the Jews revoked.

4. *A Field Full of Gold*

One day one of the disciples of R. Simeon left Palestine, his native land, and went to some foreign country, where he became very rich. The other disciples, upon hearing of the good fortune that had come to their colleague, expressed a desire to leave their homeland.

R. Simeon was very much grieved when he heard that his disciples had decided to go to a foreign land to seek their fortune. He took them to a certain valley in front of Meron, and he prayed thus: "Valley, valley, fill yourself up with gold denars."

To the great surprise of the disciples, the valley began to produce gold denars in great abundance, and R. Simeon said to his disciples: "If gold is all you want, here is enough gold to satisfy your hearts' desire."

The disciples, taken by surprise, remained silent, and R. Simeon continued: "You can take all the gold you want, but know you that whatever you take now is a part of the share which you are to receive in the world to come. The reward for the study of the Torah, cannot be received in this world, but in the world to come."

The disciples, abashed by the reproachful words of their saintly master, took none of the gold that lay in the field. They walked silently away, and no longer spoke of leaving their homeland to seek their fortunes.

CHAPTER XXVII

RABBI ELAZAR BEN RABBI SIMEON

1. *Elijah as an Instructor*



IN his young days, R. Elazar, the son of R. Simeon ben Yohai, was an ignorant youth. He supported himself by being a baggage-carrier.

One day, Elijah appeared to Elazar in the guise of an old man and said to him: "Procure an animal for me, for I desire to hire it to go on a journey."

"What kind of a load have you, that you require a beast to carry it?" asked Elazar.

"I have no other load but my hand-bag and my robe," replied the old man.

Elazar then sarcastically remarked to himself: "Do you see this old man? I can carry him on my shoulders to the end of the earth, and he asks me to procure a beast of burden for him."

Then turning to the old man, Elazar said: "Do you want to ride on my shoulders?"

"Yes," said the old man.

Elazar put the old man on his shoulder, and he carried him up hills and down valleys, and even

through fields full of thistles and thorns. Finally Elazar began to tire of the load, which was getting rather heavy, and he said to the rider: "Old man, you had better make yourself lighter, or I shall have to throw you off my shoulder."

"Do you desire to take a little rest?" inquired the old man.

"Yes, I would like to rest a little," said the carrier.

The two then went up to a certain field, and there sat down to rest in the shadow of a tree. The old man took out some food from his hand-bag and gave it to the carrier. After he was through eating, the old man said: "Why all this labor? Would it not be more becoming for you to adopt the occupation of your father, and devote your time to the study of the Torah?"

"Will you teach it to me?" inquired Elazar.

"Yes, I will teach it to you," replied the Prophet Elijah.

For thirteen years Elijah taught the Torah to the strong and muscular Elazar. At the end of this time, Elazar became so weakened by study that he was unable even to carry the robe of Elijah.

2. *"Yielding Like a Reed and Not Unbending Like a Cedar"*

R. Elazar spent many years in studying the Torah in Migdal Eder. When he returned home from there, he felt very proud of himself, because

of the knowledge he had acquired. He proudly rode on an ass along the bank of a river, his heart full of joy and pride.

As he rode thus, he was met by a person who was extremely ugly. The ugly man said: "Peace be to you, my teacher."

But the haughty R. Elazar made no reply to the greetings of the humble man. Instead of returning the salutation, he said: "O that good for nothing! How extremely ugly this man is! Are all the people in your town as ugly as you are?"

"I do not know about that," retorted the man, deeply insulted. "Go and tell the Artisan who created me: 'How ugly is this vessel which Thou hast made!'"

R. Elazar, realizing that he had sinned against the man, alighted from his ass, prostrated himself before the stranger, and said: "O pray pardon me."

"I shall not grant you pardon," said the stranger, "unless you go to the Artificer who created me, and say to Him: 'How ugly is this piece of work of Thine.'"

R. Elazar followed the stranger, thus asking his pardon, until they reached the city. The inhabitants came out to meet R. Elazar, received him with great honor, and shouted: "Peace be unto you, teacher and master!"

"Whom are you calling, 'teacher and master?'" inquired the stranger.

"The one that is walking behind you," replied the town folks.

"If this one is a teacher and a master, may not the like of him increase in Israel," said the stranger to the multitude.

"And why is this?" asked the people.

The stranger told the people of what had occurred, and they said to him: "Nevertheless, forgive him, because he is a very learned man."

"I shall forgive him for your sake," replied the stranger, "but providing he shall act no more thus."

R. Elazar ben Simeon thereupon went to the synagogue and said to the disciples there assembled: "Man must at all times be yielding like a reed and not unbending like a cedar."

3. *R. Elazar's Suffering*

R. Elazar once met a constable who was accustomed to seize thieves, and he said to him: "How can you tell for sure who the true thief is? Are not thieves like the wild beasts who prey at night and keep in hiding by day? Is it not likely then that you put under arrest honest people, and let the real thieves go free?"

"What can I do?" said the constable. "I must carry out the orders of the government."

"I will show you how to detect thieves," said R. Elazar. "At the fourth hour of the day, go into a wine-saloon. When you find any one there sit-

ting at a table, holding a cup of wine in his hand and dozing, make inquiries about him. If he is a scholar, then he is drowsy because he rose at an early hour to study. If he is a workingman, he is drowsy because he rose at early hour to do his work. But if he is neither, arrest him, for he is a thief."

When the Roman officials heard of the advice given by R. Elazar, they said: "Let him who composed the letter be himself the carrier; that is, let the one who gave the advice be himself the constable." So they summoned R. Elazar and ordered him to seize thieves.

R. Elazar turned out to be an efficient constable, and he used to apprehend many thieves. One day R. Joshua ben Korhah sent a letter to R. Elazar which read: "Vinegar son of wine (bad son of a good father); How long will you deliver the people of our God to slaughter?"

R. Elazar sent word back to R. Joshua: "In serving the Roman government as an apprehender of thieves, I only remove the thorns from the vineyard."

R. Joshua replied to this: "Why should you interfere? Let the Owner of the vineyard come and remove His thorns."

One day, while walking in the street, R. Elazar was accosted by a passer-by, a cleaner by trade, with these words: "Oh, you vinegar son of wine!"

"Since this man is so insolent," argued R. Ela-

zar, "then he must be wicked." So he ordered his subordinates to seize the man and put him under arrest.

Some time had elapsed, and R. Elazar felt remorse in his heart for having arrested the cleaner. He tried to redeem the prisoner, but he was unable to do so. R. Elazar then applied to himself the verse: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble."

The prisoner was then hanged, and R. Elazar stood under the gallows and wept. But those who stood by said: "Master, do not weep, for the man who was hanged, and his son, were guilty of a heinous crime."

R. Elazar, however, was not appeased, and he submitted patiently to suffering. In the evening they would put on his bed sixty spreadings of felt, and in the morning, they would take out from underneath him sixty basin-fuls of blood which had issued from the ulcers on his body. His wife would then prepare sixty kinds of pap for him, which he would eat and become well again.

In the evening R. Elazar would thus say to his pains: "Come hither, my brethren and friends, for you are welcome." In the morning, he would say to them: "Depart now, friends, for you interfere with my studies."

One day the wife of R. Elazar overheard him invite the pains to visit him, and she said: "You bring these pains upon yourself! Yet you have

almost wasted all my father's wealth trying to cure your malady!"

The wife of R. Elazar thereupon left him, and returned to her father's house. R. Elazar was thus left without money, and he was unable to obtain the sixty kinds of pap which he needed daily.

On that very day, sixty Roman captains were aboard their ship on the high seas, and a gale arose which threatened to sink the ship. Now these captains were friends of R. Elazar, and they knew that the God of their Jewish friend was wont to work miracles for him. So they prayed to God in this wise: "O God of Elazar, help us."

At once the gale subsided, and they landed safely on the shore. The captains then decided to present a gift to R. Elazar. They sent their sixty slaves, each one carrying a purse full of money, which they presented to R. Elazar. With this money, R. Elazar was able to have sixty kinds of pap prepared every day.

One day, the wife of R. Elazar said to her daughter: "Go, find out how your father is getting along now without us."

When the daughter made the visit, R. Elazar said to her: "Go and tell your mother that my wealth is now greater than hers."

4. *The Death of R. Elazar*

When R. Elazar was about to die, he said to his wife: "I know that my colleagues, the sages, are

angry with me, and therefore will not pay me the respects due me after my death. For this reason, I want you after my death to put me in one of our upper chambers instead of burying me, and not to be afraid of my dead body."

R. Elazar died soon thereafter, and his wife, faithful to her husband's request, placed his dead body in one of their upper chambers. For almost twenty-four years the body of the dead saintly sage lay in the upper chamber. Daily his wife would come up and examine the hair on his head, and to her great astonishment, whenever she would pluck out one of his hairs, there were signs of blood.

One day, the pious woman saw a worm come out of her dead husband's ear, and she became greatly alarmed, for she thought that the body had begun to decay. But that very night her husband came to her in a dream and allayed her fears. "Do not mind what you saw this day," said R. Elazar to his wife. "The reason the worm came out of my ear was because one day I had heard one insult a scholar, and I protested against it, but not as vehemently as I should have."

The people in the neighborhood knew that the dead body of the sage R. Elazar was being kept in an upper chamber in his house. Knowing that he was saintly, they would come to have him settle their disputes even after he was dead. They would stand at the threshold of the room where R.

Elazar lay, and each litigant would lay his claims before the dead sage. Then the litigants would hear a voice respond from the chamber: "So-and-so is wrong; So-and-so is not right."

One day a quarrel broke out between the widow of R. Elazar and one of her neighbors. Thereupon the neighbor said to the widow: "May your lot be like that of your husband's, who was never permitted to be buried."

When the sages heard of the remark, they said to one another: "Since things have reached such a stage, it is surely not becoming that the body of R. Elazar should not be brought to burial."

Shortly after that, R. Simeon ben Yohai, the father of the unburied sage, appeared to the sages in a dream, and he said to them: "I have one pigeon (my son's body) among you, and you will not let him come to me and be buried by my side."

The sages then decided to bury the body of R. Elazar. But the inhabitants of Akh'braya would not permit the sages to remove the body of the dead sage from the upper chamber, for they said: "Our town was always visited by wild beasts which caused a great deal of damage to human life and property. But since the body of the dead sage has been lying there, not a single beast has ever visited our town. No, we will not permit you to remove him from our midst."

Once, on the day preceding the Day of Atonement, when the people of Akh'braya were busily

engaged in preparing for the holy day, the sages sent the inhabitants of Beri to bring down the body of the saintly rabbi. But when they brought the body to the cave where R. Simeon ben Yohai had been buried, they found a snake curled around the entrance to the cave. The sages said: "Snake, snake, open your mouth and drop your tail out of there, and let the son enter the cave of his father."

At once the snake dropped the tail out of its mouth, and the body of the saintly Elazar was placed by the side of his father.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RABBI PHINEHAS BEN YAIR

1. *A Trustworthy Keeper*



ABBI Phinehas ben Yair was a son-in-law of R. Simeon ben Yohai. He was a very pious and saintly man.

Once, when R. Phinehas lived somewhere in the south, two men entered his house, and said: "Rabbi, we have two seahs of wheat which we would like to leave in your care."

"Very well," answered the saintly rabbi, "I shall take good care of your wheat."

The two strangers left the house of Phinehas and went their way. The matter slipped entirely out of their minds and they did not come back to demand their wheat.

Some time passed, and R. Phinehas said: "What can I do with the wheat? The poor men failed to come back for it, and I promised to take good care of it. If I keep it much longer, it will start to rot and become worthless."

At last he thought of a plan. The next summer he sowed the wheat in his field, and at the end of the season he reaped many seahs of wheat. The next season he again sowed the wheat he had

reaped the season before, and it again increased immensely. He repeated this process for seven years, at the end of which time the two seahs of wheat grew into many thousands.

At the end of the seventh year, the two poor men again happened to visit that neighborhood. They came to see R. Phinehas, and they said to him: "Several years ago we left two seahs of wheat in your care. Now we would like to have the wheat returned to us."

R. Phinehas recognized the two strangers, and he replied: "Come with me and I will show you where your wheat is."

He opened the doors of a large granary, and pointing to the many thousands of seahs of wheat stored there, he said to the strangers: "This is the wheat you have with me. Now bring camels and other beasts of burden, and take all that, for it is yours."

"What do you mean, rabbi?" asked the two strangers in amazement. "We never left so much wheat with you."

"For the seven years that the wheat has been left in my care," replied the rabbi, "your wheat has grown in my fields, and it has produced all this. Now it is all yours."

2. *The Mouse Gives Up the Jewel*

Once it happened that the king of the Saracens dropped a very precious jewel. Immediately a

mouse appeared on the scene and swallowed the jewel. The king was very much depressed by his loss and he was advised to visit R. Phinehas ben Yair in the land of the Jews. "This man is a saint," his councillors informed him; "it is likely that he will help you out."

The king, followed by his chief advisers, visited the house of R. Phinehas, and said to him: "Holy man, I am told that you can bring about miracles. Now, my most precious jewel dropped out of my hand, and as it fell to the ground it was swallowed by a mouse which appeared there. Perhaps you can help me recover the jewel."

"O sire," said R. Phinehas, "I am no charmer of mice, that I should enchant them to give up your jewel."

"But, holy man," begged the king, "I came all this distance because of your good reputation. Pray do not ignore my request, and make an attempt to save my jewel."

R. Phinehas made no reply to the king, but he said in an undertone: "All ye rodents must assemble in this spot."

Thousands and thousands of rodents at once passed in a procession before the saintly rabbi and the king. At last the rabbi noticed that one of the rodents had a hump on its back, and he said to the king: "This mouse has your jewel."

"O pray obtain it for me," pleaded the king.

"Rodent," ordered the saintly rabbi, "give up the jewel you have taken from the king!"

The mouse stopped at once, opened its mouth and gave up the precious jewel. The king picked it up with great delight, and exclaimed: "Holy man, this is the very jewel that I have lost!"

The king thanked the rabbi heartily and returned to his land full of joy.

3. *A Maiden Saved from Death*

In those days there lived a pious man around Jerusalem who used to dig wells along the roads leading to the city so that the pilgrims going up to the Holy City might not suffer from thirst.

One day the daughter of this pious man walked along on a road, when she came upon a river. The maiden started to wade across, but as she reached the middle, she was caught up and carried away by the powerful stream. She cried for help, but those who responded to her cries were unable to save her.

Thereupon the people ran to the house of R. Phinehas and exclaimed: "O rabbi, the daughter of the pious man who digs wells for the pilgrims has perished in a stream of water. We tried to save her, but in vain. She was carried off by the stream, and she is nowhere to be found."

"Impossible," said R. Phinehas. "Since this man is doing the will of the Holy One, blessed be

His name, by means of providing the pilgrims with water, his daughter will never perish by water."

Immediately cries were heard in the streets of the town: "Behold, the daughter of the pious man is coming!"

The people of the town turned out to meet the maiden, and they asked: "Who saved you from the stream?"

"A man whose appearance resembled that of an angel of God came and saved me," replied the maiden.

Commenting on this the sages said: "The angel came down from heaven because of the remonstrance of R. Phinehas ben Yair."

4. *Miracles*

One day, R. Phinehas was told that there was a Jewish captive somewhere in a certain town, and he set out for that town to ransom him. On the way there, the rabbi came to the rivulet Ginnai, and he was unable to cross it with his ass. So the saintly rabbi said to the rivulet: "Ginnai, divide your waters, so that I can cross to do the will of my Creator."

The rivulet made reply and said: "You are to do the will of your Creator, and I, too, am going to do the will of my Creator. As far as you are concerned, it is doubtful whether or not you will succeed in accomplishing your task. But as far

as I am concerned, I am certain of doing the will of my Creator."

"If you fail to divide your waters for me," said the rabbi, somewhat angrily, "I will order that water shall no longer flow in your bed."

Intimidated by the words of the saint, the rivulet divided its waters, so that the rabbi might cross on dry land.

There were also two other people waiting for an opportunity to cross the rivulet. One was a Jew who had a load of wheat which he desired to bring to the mill to have it ground into flour for the Passover, and the other traveler was an Arabian merchant who had traveled with them together.

When R. Phinehas was across, he said to the rivulet: "Ginnai, divide your waters for this Israelite, too, for he is engaged in the performance of a holy task."

The rivulet again divided its waters for the Israelite to go across.

"Ginnai, divide your waters once more for this Arabian to pass," ordered the saintly rabbi; "lest he will say: 'Is that the way you Jews treat your fellow-travelers? You cross safely and you leave your fellow-traveler behind.'"

So the rivulet divided its waters a third time for the Arabian merchant to cross.

Toward evening, R. Phinehas arrived at a certain inn. The inn-keeper removed the harness

from the rabbi's ass and gave it some grain to eat, but the ass refused to eat of it. Thinking that the ass refused to eat of the grain because it was not clean, the inn-keeper sifted the grain through a sieve, but the ass again refused to eat it. The inn-keeper then cleaned the wheat of all dirt with his hands, but the ass again refused to eat it. The inn-keeper then entered the inn and said to R. Phinehas: "Rabbi, your ass would not take of the fodder I gave it. I cleaned it thoroughly, but it still refuses to eat it."

"It is likely that you failed to set aside the tithe of the grain for the Levite," said the saintly rabbi, "and that is why the ass refuses to eat it."

The inn-keeper thereupon set aside a tithe of the grain for the Levite, and to his great surprise the ass partook of the grain. When the owner of the ass was informed of what had happened, he said: "This poor creature is going on a mission to perform the will of its Creator, and you want it to eat grain of which the Levitical share has not been set aside?"

Rabbi Judah ha-Nassi was informed that R. Phinehas was coming, and he went out to meet him. R. Judah said to R. Phinehas: "Would you consent to eat at my table?"

"I certainly will consent to it," said the saintly rabbi.

The face of R. Judah was illumined with joy when R. Phinehas consented to dine at his table,

for he knew that R. Phinehas never before had tasted bread at somebody else's table. R. Phinehas noticed the joy of R. Judah, and he remarked: "Do you suppose that I vowed not to derive any benefit from a Jew? Our people are holy and one may derive benefits at their hands. But there are some who are anxious to do good, but have not the means to do it. Others have the means, but are unwilling to do good. You, however, are blessed with both, you are anxious to do good, and you have the means to do it. But at present I am in great haste, for I am on my way to perform a holy task, therefore I am unable to accept your invitation. On my way back, I will call upon you."

On his way back, R. Phinehas happened to enter the premises of R. Judah ha-Nassi through an entrance where there stood white mules. Now white mules cause a great deal of damage to persons and to property. R. Phinehas therefore said: "The Angel of Death is in the house of this man; shall I then eat at his table?"

R. Judah was told of the objection raised by R. Phinehas. He came out to meet him, and he offered to dispose of the mules, but R. Phinehas would not consent to any of the ways R. Judah had suggested of how to dispose of them. R. Judah begged R. Phinehas persistently to accept the invitation, and the latter was unable to his sorrow to accept it on account of the mules. So a miracle happened. A mountain rose between

the two rabbis and separated them, so that R. Judah was unable to persist any longer.

Thereupon R. Judah said: "If so many miracles are wrought for the righteous during their lifetime, how much more will it be true after their death."

CHAPTER XXIX

RABBI JUDAH HA-NASSI

1. *The Beginning of a Life-long Friendship*



WHEN R. Simeon the son of Gamaliel II was chief of the Sanhedrin, the highest court in Jerusalem, the Roman government decreed that no male children born by the Jews should be circumcised. At that time a son was born to R. Simeon, who was destined to become known as "Our Teacher, the Saint."

When this child was born, R. Simeon argued: "How can we disregard the will of the Holy One, blessed be His name, and obey the decree of these wicked people?"

R. Simon therefore disregarded the decree of the Roman government, and circumcised his newly-born son. The Roman officer stationed in that city was informed of R. Simeon's act, and he summoned him to appear before him. "Why did you violate the decree of the emperor?" inquired the Roman representative of R. Simeon.

"I am compelled to fulfill the will of the Holy One, blessed be His name," replied R. Simeon.

"I owe you much respect, for you are the head of your people," said the Roman representative, "but I am unable to let the matter rest, because it is a royal decree."

"Well, and what is your wish?" asked R. Simeon.

"I will present this matter to the emperor in Rome, and let him act as he sees fit," replied the officer.

The Roman officer thereupon sent the newly-born child together with his mother to Rome. The woman and her babe traveled all day and toward evening she arrived at one of the palaces that belonged to the Roman emperor. About that time the wife of the Roman emperor gave birth to Marcus Aurelius. The wife of R. Simeon visited the empress, for they were friends.

"What is the purpose of your visit?" asked the empress.

The wife of R. Simeon replied: "The emperor has decreed that we violate the law of our God and abstain from circumcising our children. Now this babe was born to me, and because I had it circumcised, I am being taken to the emperor."

"If you wish," suggested the empress, "you can take my child, who is not circumcised, to the emperor, and leave your child here with me."

The mother of R. Judah consented, and she left her child with the empress and brought Marcus Aurelius before the emperor.

"Why did you bring this woman and her child here before me?" inquired the emperor.

"Because his father, the chief of the Jews, has violated your decree," replied the accusing officer. "He circumcised this child, and disregarded your command, O sire."

The emperor ordered that the child be examined in order to ascertain if it was really circumcised. When it was discovered that the child in the arms of R. Simeon's wife was uncircumcised, the emperor exclaimed: "What, did this officer from Judaea come to mock me! Let him be hanged on the gallows!"

Thereupon R. Simeon's wife with the infant Marcus Aurelius was dismissed from the presence of the emperor. The happy mother, on her way home, stopped at the palace of the empress, where the babies were exchanged and restored to their rightful mothers. The empress then said to the wife of R. Simeon: "Since the life of your child was saved through my newly-born son, may these two children be friends forever."

2. The Two Dumb Disciples

R. Judah ha-Nassi grew up to be a great scholar. He was extremely wealthy and very influential, because he was on intimate terms with the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. But with all that he was modest and humble. He was at the head of a great college, and thousands of pupils

from all over the country came to hear his lectures.

Among the disciples that came to listen to R. Judah's lectures, there were two who were dumb. Whenever R. Judah came to college, the two mute students were there, listening attentively, nodding their heads and moving their lips.

For many years these two speechless disciples attended the lectures. One day R. Judah said: "These two dumb young men attend to my lectures regularly; I wonder if they understand anything I say." So he prayed to God that He cure these two ardent students of the Law, so that they might be able to talk.

God hearkened to the prayer of R. Judah, and the two dumb young men commenced to speak. They were examined by the disciples to find out if they had learned anything at all by coming regularly to the lectures. To the great astonishment of all, the two young men remembered all the teachings of their master R. Judah.

3. *R. Judah's Suffering*

One day, a butcher led a little calf to the slaughtering house. The little calf broke loose from the butcher and ran away. It ran and ran, until it met R. Judah walking in the street. The calf then put its head in the lap of the rabbi's garment and it wailed over its lot. "O saintly rabbi," it said, "pray save me."

"Go," said R. Judah to the wailing calf, "because you have been created for that purpose."

Thereupon the heavenly tribunal body said: "Since R. Judah has no pity on dumb animals, no pity should be shown him from heaven. Let great suffering befall him."

For thirteen years R. Judah suffered great pain; six years he suffered from fever, and seven years from scurvy. His suffering was very great, yet he would say: "Sufferings are welcome."

At last it happened one day that one of the servants in R. Judah's household was sweeping the house. On the floor of that room there lay several young kittens, and the servant wanted to sweep them out together with the dirt, when R. Judah said to her: "Do no harm to these creatures, for it is written: 'And His tender mercies are over all His works.'"

Thereupon the heavenly tribunal said: "Since R. Judah has compassion on dumb animals, he deserves mercy from heaven."

And his sufferings ceased at once.

4. *R. Judah and the Roman Emperor*

The Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, was an ardent friend of R. Judah. But the emperor kept this friendship a secret, as he did not wish that any of the Romans should become aware of it. He had a secret subterranean passage that led into the house of R. Judah, and through this passage he

would go to pay the latter daily visits. He was accustomed to take a guard with him when going to visit R. Judah, and upon reaching the entrance to the secret passage, he would kill the guard, so that he should not disclose to any one his relations with R. Judah. The emperor also requested R. Judah that, during his visits, no one else should be permitted to be present.

One day, the emperor paid his usual visit to R. Judah, and to his disappointment he found there one of the numerous disciples, whose name was R. Hanina bar Hama. Thereupon the emperor said to R. Judah: "Have I not requested you that no one else be found in the room when I visit you?"

"O sire," replied R. Judah, "this is not an ordinary human being; he may be likened to an angel of God."

"Tell him then to go and call the guard that is sleeping at the entrance of the secret passage," said the emperor, referring to the guard he had killed on entering.

R. Judah then said to R. Hanina: "Go to the entrance of the passage, wake up the guard and summon him to appear here."

R. Hanina went to the entrance of the passage, and to his great astonishment found the guard lying dead. Not knowing that the emperor himself had killed him, R. Hanina said: "What can I do now? If I go and inform the emperor of the

bad news, then I will be violating the rule that one should not go back to him that sent him to bring bad news. If I go away, leaving the dead guard here, and do not report back to the emperor, I will be guilty of insulting his majesty."

R. Hanina thereupon prayed to God that the guard be brought back to life. His prayer was heard in heaven, and sure enough the guard woke up and stood on his feet. "Now, go and see the emperor," said R. Hanina to the guard, "for he desires to see you."

R. Hanina walked away, and the guard presented himself before the emperor and R. Judah. Thereupon the emperor said to the rabbi: "I am convinced that even the smallest of the sages can bring the dead back to life, because they are like angels of God. Nevertheless I ask you not to permit any one to be present when I come here."

5. The Body and the Soul Punished Together

Once the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, said to R. Judah ha-Nassi: "You maintain that in the future world God will punish man for his wrong doings. Now when the body and the soul are tried by the Heavenly Court, they can free themselves from punishment in this wise: The body can say: 'I am innocent, for I am incapable of sinning. You can see for yourselves, that from the moment the soul left me, I have been lying in my grave like a lifeless stone. It is therefore the

fault of the soul that I sinned when I was alive.' The soul, on the other hand, can claim: 'I am innocent, it was the body that committed all the sins. For ever since I left the body, I have been flying about like a little bird in the air, without desire for lust, and incapable of sinning.' "

R. Judah ha-Nassi replied: "O sire, let me tell you a parable: A king once possessed a very beautiful orchard. When the fruit became ripe, the king said: 'I cannot entrust this precious and rare fruit into the care of a watchman.'

"Accordingly, he placed two watchmen in the orchard, one of whom was blind and the other lame in both legs. The king said: 'Well, these watchmen will be unable to eat of the precious fruit, for one is unable to see and the other is unable to walk.'

"In the orchard, the lame watchman said to the blind one: 'I see some pretty ripe fruit here, and I wonder how we can get it, for I am unable to walk and you are unable to see.'

" 'I will let you ride on my shoulder,' said the blind man; 'I will take you over to the tree, following your directions, and you will pick the fruit from the tree.'

"So the lame man sat on the shoulder of the blind man, and together they walked over to the tree and plucked the ripe fruit. Little by little, the two watchmen ate up all the precious fruit.

"After a time the king visited the garden, and to

his great disappointment, the fruit was not there. 'Who took all this fruit?' shouted the king at the two watchmen.

"The blind watchman pleaded: 'O sire, am I able to see? How could I have taken the fruit?'

"And the lame watchman pleaded: 'O sire, am I able to walk? How could I have taken the fruit from the trees?'

"What did the king do? He made the lame watchman sit on the shoulder of the blind one, and he said to them: 'Jointly you have committed the crime and jointly you shall be punished.'

"The Holy One, blessed be He, too, throws the soul into the body after its death, and punishes them together."

6. *The Death of R. Judah*

Rabbi Judah became very sick and the sad news was soon spread throughout the land, that the death of the saint was approaching. Many of the inhabitants of the neighboring towns had gathered in Sepphoris in order to show him their sympathy.

R. Judah said: "I desire to speak to my children."

When his children entered, the dying saint said to them: "My sons, you must pay your mother all respects after my death. You must make no alterations in my domestic establishment: the candle must burn in its usual place, the table must be

prepared and set as before, and the bed must be made and left in its place. It is my wish that my two servants, Jose of Phaeno, and Simon the Parthian, who served me with great affection during my lifetime, should take charge of my corpse after my death."

Having dismissed his sons from his presence, the dying saint said: "I desire that the sages, the members of the Sanhedrin, come in."

When the sages entered, he said to them: "It is my wish that you bury me without any great pomp, that you allow no mourning ceremonies to be performed in the small towns, and that you re-open the college thirty days after my death. It is also my wish that the office of Patriarch be conferred on my son Gamaliel, that my younger son Simeon be appointed to the office of Haham (speaker), and that Hanina bar Hama be chosen president of the college."

R. Judah then raised his ten fingers toward heaven and said: "Master of the world! It is known to Thee that I toiled with my ten fingers (*i.e.*, I devoted all my time and energy) to acquire the knowledge of the Torah, and yet I derived no benefit or pleasure from this world, even as much as the smallest finger can accomplish. May it be Thy will that there be peace in my eternal resting place."

Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying: "He entereth into peace."

All the people fasted, and the sages assembled to pray to God for mercy on behalf of their beloved Patriarch. The people could not believe that R. Judah could die, and they therefore announced: "Whoever will inform us that the rabbi is dead, will be put to death by the sword."

The rabbi's handmaid then went up to the roof of the house and said thus: "The angels in heaven want the rabbi's presence, and the dwellers of earth want the rabbi to remain with them. May it be the will of God that they who dwell below defeat them that dwell above."

However, when she noticed that her saintly master was in fearful agony, she prayed thus: "May it now be the will of God that they who dwell in heaven above defeat them that dwell on earth below."

But the sages would not cease praying for mercy, and the soul of the saint would not depart. So the servant dropped a heavy pitcher from the roof which caused a crash. The sages stopped their prayers for one moment at the sudden sound, and the soul of R. Judah the saint, ascended to heaven.

The sages said to Bar Kappara: "Go in and see how our master fares."

Bar Kappara went in just at the moment when R. Judah gave up his soul. He tore his garments and he went out to the big crowd that had gathered and said: "Angels and mortals contended for

the ark of the covenant; the angels have conquered the mortals, and the ark has vanished."

The people uttered a great cry of pain, and exclaimed: "Is he dead?"

"You have said it," replied Bar Kappara.

On the day that R. Judah gave up his soul, a heavenly voice was heard saying: "Whosoever was present at the departure of R. Judah is chosen for eternal bliss in the hereafter."

There was a certain washer who was wont to visit the house of R. Judah daily, but on that particular day he happened to stay away. When he heard the heavenly voice, he was very much grieved at the fact that he was not present at the death of the rabbi. So he went up the roof of his house and plunged to the ground. He was killed instantly, and another voice announced: "This washer, too, is chosen for bliss in the hereafter."

CHAPTER XXX

RABBI HIYYA

1. *Elijah Appears in the Form of R. Hiyya*



ABBI Judah ha-Nassi one day expressed his respect for the chief of the Babylonian Jews, Rab Huna. As he finished saying that, R. Hiyya said to him: "Why, he is outside."

The face of R. Judah turned pale, when he heard this announcement. R. Hiyya noticed that, and he said to R. Judah: "You have nothing to fear, because the chief of the Babylonian Jews arrived here in his coffin."

Rabbi Judah was displeased at R. Hiyya's jest, and dismissed him from his presence in an extremely polite manner. He said to him: "Go outside and see who wants you there."

R. Hiyya went outside, and, finding no one there, understood that Rabbi Judah had meant that as a rebuke, and that therefore he must be under the ban of excommunication for no less than thirty days. He therefore stayed away from college for a period of thirty days. During that

time R. Hiyya taught all the principles of the Torah to his nephew Abba Arikha, or as he is generally known, Rab.

Now for many years Rabbi Judah had been suffering from a severe toothache. At the end of the thirty days, Elijah appeared to Rabbi Judah in the form of R. Hiyya. He placed his hand on R. Judah's teeth, and his great pain vanished at once. On the morrow, R. Hiyya appeared at college, and he asked of R. Judah: "How is your toothache?"

The rabbi replied: "From the moment you placed your hand on my teeth, my severe pain has disappeared."

"Rabbi, I do not know what you mean," said R. Hiyya in astonishment.

R. Judah understood that the one who placed his hands on his teeth was none other than Elijah, of blessed memory, who had appeared in the form of R. Hiyya. R. Judah then said: "Since Hiyya is so worthy that Elijah appeared in his form, we must have a great deal of respect for him."

He then ordered that his disciples admit R. Hiyya in the first row of scholars.

2. *Elijah Punished*

The Prophet Elijah would descend from heaven every day to visit the college of R. Judah ha-Nassi and to hear his wisdom. Once, on a New Moon, Elijah appeared late at college, and

R. Judah asked: "Master, why did you come late to-day?"

"I am late to-day," replied Elijah, "for the reason that I had first to wake up Abraham and wash his hands. Then he prayed, and when he was through with his prayers, I had to put him back in his place. I had to do the same with Isaac and with Jacob."

"Why then did you not wake up the three of them at one and the same time?" asked Rabbi Judah.

"I was afraid," replied Elijah, "that if the three of them pray fervently together, they might cause the Messiah to appear before due time."

"Are there any in this world who can be likened to our three ancestors?" inquired Rabbi Judah.

"Yes, there are," replied Elijah. "R. Hiyya and his sons."

Rabbi Judah then proclaimed a fast day, and invited R. Hiyya and his sons to act as Readers. When the Readers recited: "Thou causest the wind to blow," a strong wind commenced to blow. When they recited: "Thou causest the rain to fall," rain started to fall. When they were about to recite: "Thou quickenest the dead," the world began to quake.

"Who revealed this secret to the dwellers of the earth?" inquired the dwellers in heaven.

"Elijah revealed this secret," was the reply.

Thereupon Elijah was summoned and they pun-

ished him with sixty fiery lashes. Elijah then descended from heaven in the form of a fiery bear, entered the synagogue and dispersed the worshipers.

3. *R. Hiyya Gives Up His Soul*

In the time of R. Hiyya, people neglected to teach their children the Law of God. Accordingly, R. Hiyya raised flax, of which he wove nets. With these nets he caught deer in forests. The meat of the deer he fed to poor orphans who had no one to take care of them. The skins he used in making parchments upon which he wrote the Five Books of Moses, and the laws of the sages.

R. Hiyya then went to every community where there was no teacher, and there he assembled all the small children and taught them the Law of God. Thus R. Hiyya spread the knowledge of the Law of God among the children of Israel. Because of this, the Angel of Death had no power to approach R. Hiyya, when he was sent down from heaven to take his soul.

One day, the Angel of Death appeared at the door of R. Hiyya's house in the guise of a poor man. He knocked at the door, and when it was opened, he said: "Pray, let me have a morsel of bread."

When a morsel of bread was brought out to the Angel of Death, he said to R. Hiyya: "I see that you have compassion on the poor and supply them

with their wants. Why should you have no compassion on me? Know you not that I was sent down from heaven to take your soul?"

Thus saying, the Angel of Death showed R. Hiyya a fiery rod. The saintly rabbi then yielded and gave up his soul to the Angel of Death.

4. *R. Hiyya's Greatness in Heaven*

In those days there lived a certain scholar, in whose house Elijah was a frequent visitor. Once, toward evening, this scholar's eyes suddenly appeared as if they had been singed by a flame. When he was asked for the cause of it, he told the following:

"One day, I requested Elijah that he show me the sages as they come up to take part in the heavenly tribunal.

"Elijah said to me: 'Thou hast permission to gaze at every sage as he comes up seated on his throne, but thou mayest not gaze at the throne on which R. Hiyya comes up.'

"I then asked: 'How will I be able to tell which is the throne of R. Hiyya?'

"Elijah replied: 'All the other thrones, as they come up, are accompanied by angels. But the throne of R. Hiyya comes up all by itself.'

"When I gazed at the wonderful procession of thrones accompanied by angels, I beheld the throne that was carried by itself. I knew that this one belonged to R. Hiyya and that I was not per-

mitted to gaze at it. But I was unable to restrain myself, and I looked at the throne in spite of the warning given to me by Elijah. Immediately two sparks of fire struck both of my eyes and robbed me of my eyesight.

"On the following day I went to the grave of R. Hiyya, prostrated myself on it, and said: "Master, I study your Mishnah, and now I am unable to do it, because I am deprived of my eyesight.'

"No sooner had I finished praying than my eyesight was restored to me."

CHAPTER XXXI

AMORAIM

1. *The Messiah at the Gate of Rome*



ABBI Joshua ben Levi, a disciple of Rabbi Phinehas ben Yair, was noted not only for his great wisdom, but also for his piety.

One day R. Joshua ben Levi found Elijah standing by the entrance to the cave of R. Simeon ben Yohai. R. Joshua asked of Elijah: "Tell me, pray, if I will have a share in the bliss of the future world."

"It all depends whether this Master will agree to it," said Elijah, referring to the Divine Majesty that was present.

"Tell me, pray, when the Messiah will come," said R. Joshua.

"Go and ask him when he will come," answered Elijah.

"Where can he be found?" asked R. Joshua.

"He is sitting at the gate of Rome," said Elijah.

"How can he be distinguished?" asked R. Joshua.

Elijah replied: "He sits among the poor whose bodies are covered with sores. All the rest of the poor dress all their wounds at one time, but the Messiah dresses his wounds one by one. He does not want to dress them all at one time, because he says: 'In case I am summoned to come, let me not be detained.'"

R. Joshua thereupon went to look for the Messiah at the gate of Rome. He recognized the Messiah by the description he had received from Elijah, and he said: "Peace be unto you, my teacher and master."

"Peace be unto you, Ben Levi," replied the Messiah.

"Master, when will you come to redeem us?" asked R. Joshua.

"I will come to-day," replied the Messiah.

R. Joshua met Elijah again on the following day. Elijah asked: "What did the Messiah tell you?"

"He told me: 'Peace be unto you, Ben Levi,'" replied Joshua.

Elijah then said: "Since the Messiah called you Ben Levi, you may rest assured that you and your father will have a share in the bliss of the next world."

"But he lied to me," protested R. Joshua, "for he told me that he would come to-day and he did not."

"The Messiah did not lie to you, Joshua,"

replied Elijah. "He said thus: 'I will come to-day, if only you hearken to His voice.' "

2. The Angel of Death Rendered Helpless

When the time came for R. Joshua ben Levi to depart from this world, the Angel of Death was told to go and take the soul of the saintly rabbi. R. Joshua, on beholding the Angel of Death, said to him: "Show me the place assigned to me in Paradise."

"Very well," said the Angel of Death.

"But I fear that you will scare me on the way to Paradise, when I see you with that knife in your hand," said R. Joshua. "Let me keep that knife, and I will go with you."

When the Angel of Death, accompanied by R. Joshua, reached Paradise, the former raised the latter over the high wall surrounding it so that he could see the interior of it. But R. Joshua slipped out of the grasp of the Angel of Death, jumped over the wall, and dropped inside of Paradise, taking the knife with him. The Angel of Death thereupon seized R. Joshua by his coat, ready to pull him back, but R. Joshua said: "I swear that I will not come back."

God then said: "Since Joshua always kept his oath and never sought to be absolved from it, then he must abide by his oath this time, too."

The Angel of Death then pleaded with R. Joshua: "Give me back my knife."

But R. Joshua refused to surrender it.

A heavenly voice interfered and said: "Joshua, surrender the knife, for it is needed by living beings."

Elijah, acting as herald, went before R. Joshua and proclaimed: "Make way for Ben Levi! Make way for Ben Levi!"

Joshua found R. Simeon ben Yohai sitting on a chair made of pure gold. R. Simeon asked: "Are you Ben Levi?"

"I am he," replied Joshua.

"Was there ever a rainbow visible during your lifetime?" asked R. Simeon.

"There was," replied Ben Levi.

Now a rainbow shows that the generation is sinful and that it deserves a doom equal to that of the generation of the flood. But God, recalling the covenant he made with Noah, spares that generation. When, however, there is a true saint alive in that sinful generation, the rainbow is not needed.

R. Simeon therefore said to R. Joshua: "If a rainbow was visible in your days, you are not Ben Levi." By this R. Simeon meant that Ben Levi was not a true saint.

3. *The Torah Is Greater than Wealth*

One of the most prominent rabbis of the generation of sages known as Amoraim, was R. Johanan.

He was known not only for his great learning and wisdom, but also for his great beauty. His father died before he was born, and his mother died at his birth.

One day R. Johanan walked from Tiberius to Sepphoris, accompanied by R. Hiyya bar Abba, one of his disciples. As they passed by a certain field, R. Johanan said to his disciple: "Do you see this fertile field? It was once mine, but I sold it because I desired to study the Law."

They passed a field of olive trees, and R. Johanan said to his disciple: "Do you see this orchard? It was once mine, but I sold it because I wished to study."

Then they passed by an olive yard, and R. Johanan said to his disciple: "Do you see this olive yard? A few days ago it was mine, but I sold it, because I was anxious to study the Law of God."

Thereupon R. Hiyya began to weep, and R. Johanan said to him: "Hiyya, why do you weep?"

"I weep," said R. Hiyya, "because you left nothing of your property to support yourself in your old age."

"Is this absurd in your opinion," asked R. Johanan, "that I have sold something that was given in six days and acquired in its stead something that was given in forty days? The whole world was created in but six days, but it took forty days for the Torah to be given."

4. *R. Johanan at the Head of College*

Ilfa and R. Johanan were for many years engaged in study, and then they found themselves in straits. Thereupon they said to one another: "Let us devote our time to some business, so that we may earn some money with which to support ourselves."

Fatigued from their long walk, the two sages sat down near a dilapidated wall to rest and to eat bread. As they sat there, two ministering angels came, and one of them said to the other: "Come, let us knock the wall down on these two travelers and kill them, for they have abandoned the study of the Law of God which gives everlasting life, and are going to engage in an occupation that gives only temporary life."

"Leave them alone," replied the other angel, "for here is one of the two who is in luck."

R. Johanan asked Ilfa: "Did you hear anything said?"

"No, I have heard nothing," replied Ilfa.

R. Johanan thought: "Since my colleague has heard nothing, and only I heard it, it is evident that the angel referred to me and not to him."

Thereupon R. Johanan said to Ilfa: "Let us return and continue our study."

But Ilfa refused to return, and R. Johanan returned to college by himself. He was soon

appointed the head of the college. When Ilfa came back, the disciples said: "If you had studied the Law of God all the time, you would have been appointed the head of the college."

5. *The Sick Healed*

R. Elazar once became sick and he was visited by R. Johanan. The latter found the sick scholar in a dark room. R. Johanan uncovered his arm from which rays of light radiated in the dark room. He then noticed that R. Elazar was weeping, and he asked: "What reason have you to weep? Is it because you did not teach the Law of God to many? This should not cause you any grief, because it is immaterial whether one accomplish much or little, as long as he is doing it for the sake of Heaven. Do you weep because you cannot afford to purchase sufficient food for yourself? This should not grieve you, because not every man deserves to enjoy two tables—knowledge of the Law and wealth at the same time. Do you weep because you have no sons? Behold, here is a small bone in my possession of the tenth son that I have buried."

"I weep not for any of these," replied the sick sage. "I weep that dust should destroy this beauty."

"This is worth while weeping for," remarked R. Johanan, and both of them wept together.

In the meantime R. Johanan asked of R. Elazar: "Are these sufferings welcome to you?"

"I desire neither them nor their reward," replied R. Elazar.

"Give me your hand," said R. Johanan.

R. Johanan raised up the sick sage, who at once became well again.

6. *Resh Lakish*

One day R. Johanan was bathing in the waters of the Jordan. Resh Lakish, who belonged to a company of robbers, was attracted by the great beauty of R. Johanan and jumped across the Jordan in one leap. R. Johanan said: "Give your physical strength for the study of the Law."

"You give your beauty to women," replied Lakish.

"If you will consent to come to our fold," said R. Johanan, "I will give you for wife a sister of mine who is more beautiful than I."

Resh Lakish wanted to leap back to shore, but he was unable to do it. R. Johanan then taught Resh Lakish the Law and he became a great scholar. He also kept his promise and gave his sister to Resh Lakish in marriage.

7. *The Dead Refuse to Come to Life*

When Rab Kahana, who resided in Babylon, was about to go up to Jerusalem, his master Rab said to him: "Take care that you do not ask R. Johanan

any questions for seven years, for the purpose of contradicting him, lest he get angry and punish you."

When Rab Kahana arrived at the college in Palestine headed by R. Johanan, he found Resh Lakish explaining to the students a certain lecture previously delivered by R. Johanan. Through with the exposition, Resh Lakish immediately left the college, and R. Kahana said to the disciples: "Where did Resh Lakish go?"

"Why do you ask that?" inquired the disciples.

"Because I have several questions to ask him pertaining to this lecture," responded Rab Kahana.

The disciples thereupon went to the house of Resh Lakish and said: "A Babylonian scholar has come here who desires to ask several questions concerning the lecture of our master, R. Johanan."

Resh Lakish in turn went to the house of R. Johanan and said: "Master, a lion has come from Babylon. Prepare well the chapter you are to explain at college to-morrow."

On the morrow, when R. Johanan arrived at college to lecture, he ordered that the Babylonian scholar be placed in the first row of the students. R. Johanan then laid down a certain principle of law, but R. Kahana failed to raise any objection to it. He then laid down another principle of law, and again R. Kahana failed to pass any remark. R. Kahana's dignity was then lowered in the eyes of R. Johanan and he was removed seven

rows to the rear. R. Johanan then remarked to Resh Lakish: "The lion you spoke about has turned out to be a fox."

Humiliated by this demotion, R. Kahana said: "May these seven rows which I was removed take the place of the seven years during which my master ordered me to abstain from asking questions."

Thereupon he rose to his feet and said: "Pray, let the master of the college repeat the entire lesson."

When R. Johanan went over the lecture again, R. Kahana asked questions at every step. Seven questions did R. Kahana ask, to which R. Johanan was unable to reply, and the former was again promoted to the first row of students.

Now it was customary for all the disciples to sit on the ground, while R. Johanan, the head of the college, sat on seven woolen cushions during the lectures. For every question R. Johanan was unable to answer to R. Kahana, the former, as a sign of deference to the Babylonian scholar, pulled out from underneath him one woolen cushion, until he remained sitting on the ground, the same as his disciples.

Now R. Johanan was an old man, and his eye-brows were very long. R. Johanan said: "Raise my eye-brows so that I may be able to see the man who asked these questions."

They lifted his eye-brows with a pair of silver pincers. R. Johanan noticed that R. Kahana's lips



Rabbi Johanan, the head of the college, sat on seven woolen cushions

were parted, and thought he was laughing at him. R. Johanan became very angry over the supposed insult, and the Babylonian scholar died.

On the morrow, R. Johanan said to his disciples: "Did you notice what this Babylonian did?"

"O master," replied his disciples, "he did not intend to laugh or insult you. His lips are thus naturally parted, making it appear as though he were laughing."

R. Johanan thereupon went to the cave in which R. Kahana had been buried, but he found it encircled by a snake, so that he was unable to enter it. R. Johanan said: "Snake, snake, open your mouth and drop your tail out of it, so that the master may come to see his disciple."

The snake refused to obey, and R. Johanan said: "Snake, snake, open your mouth, so that one colleague may come to see another colleague."

The snake still refused to obey and R. Johanan said: "Snake, snake, open your mouth and drop your tail out of it, so that a disciple may come to see his master."

Thereupon the snake opened its mouth, and R. Johanan entered the cave. There he prayed to God for mercy, and life was restored to the Babylonian scholar. When he opened his eyes, R. Johanan said to him: "Had I known that my master's lips were naturally parted that way, I would not have become angry. Now pray, let my master come back to us."

R. Kahana replied: "If it were possible for you to pray to God that I should not taste the agony of death again, I would go with you, otherwise I will not go with you. Since that awful hour has passed, let it not come back again."

R. Johanan nevertheless placed him in an erect position. Then he asked him to explain all doubtful points of the Law, and the revived scholar answered them all, but he would not come back to live and die again.

8. *The Death of Resh Lakish*

Once a controversy arose among the sages of the college about a certain law regarding swords, knives, javelins, etc. In this controversy, Resh Lakish disagreed with the opinion of his brother-in-law R. Johanan. The latter, vexed by the opposition offered by the former, said: "The former robber knows the nature of deadly weapons."

"What good did you do me?" asked Resh Lakish, somewhat angered at the remark. "There, among the robbers' band, I was called Rabbi (chief), and here, among the scholars, I am called Rabbi."

"But I have done you good," retorted the aged R. Johanan, "in that I brought you under the wings of Divine Majesty, by teaching you the Law of God."

R. Johanan was very much discouraged and downcast at the remark made by Resh Lakish. As

a result of this, Resh Lakish fell seriously ill. His wife, who was the sister of R. Johanan, pleaded with her brother to forgive her husband and save his life. But R. Johanan refused, and shortly thereafter, Resh Lakish died.

R. Johanan was deeply grieved at the death of Resh Lakish, and the sages sent R. Elazar ben Pedath to discuss the Torah with R. Johanan, so as to divert his mind and cause him to forget his loss. R. Elazar tried to prove that every law laid down by R. Johanan was correct, and for this purpose he cited higher authorities.

"Did they send you here to replace Resh Lakish?" inquired R. Johanan. "Whenever I said something in the presence of Resh Lakish, he would ask me twenty-four questions, and he would himself answer them. In this manner the Law was thoroughly studied and explained. But you simply tell me that my view is the correct one. Do I not know myself that my view is the correct one?"

R. Johanan thereupon rose to his feet, rent his clothes, and cried biterly: "Alas, where are you, Resh Lakish! Where are you, Resh Lakish!"

9. *Rab*

Abba Arikha, or, as he is commonly known, Rab, was at the head of the Babylon college. He was one of the foremost disciples of R. Judah ha-Nassi.

Rab once had a misunderstanding with a

butcher in his community. Now on the eve of the Day of Atonement, it is the duty of every Jew to ask the pardon of any one he might have wronged during the year. This butcher failed to appear to ask for Rab's pardon, and the rabbi said that he would go and ask for the butcher's pardon. On the way, Rab was met by Rab Huna, who asked: "Where are you going?"

"I am going to ask the pardon of a certain man," replied Rab.

R. Huna thereupon remarked to those who had accompanied him: "Abba is on his way to kill a man."

And so it was. Rab stood at the entrance of the butcher-shop, where the butcher was occupied with cutting open the skull of an animal. The butcher at last noticed Rab standing at the entrance, and he said: "You are Abba, are not you! Begone, for I will have nothing to do with you."

While he was saying this, the butcher forcibly hit the skull of the animal with his long knife. Whereupon a bone unloosened itself from the skull, hit the butcher in the head and caused his immediate death.

10. *Samuel Yarhinai*

Samuel was the physician of R. Judah ha-Nassi, or Rabbi, as he is commonly called. Once Rabbi's eyes became very sore, and Samuel said to him: "I will put some medicine into your eyes."

"I shall not be able to bear the pain," replied Rabbi.

"Then I will smear a salve over your eyes," said Samuel.

"I shall not be able to bear that, either," replied Rabbi.

Thereupon Samuel inserted some medicine, which he had prepared, into a tube. This tube he placed under the pillow upon which Rabbi slept at night, and the odor that issued from the medicine cured Rabbi's eyes. Rabbi then wanted to ordain Samuel, because of his great learning, but the moment was not favorable. This grieved Rabbi very much, but Samuel said to him: "Let not this cause you any regret, for I saw the book of Adam, wherein was recorded all the leaders and the rabbis of each generation. In that book I saw recorded: 'Samuel Yarhinai shall be called a scholar but not a rabbi, and he shall heal Rabbi of his sickness.'"

Abba ben Abba, the father of Samuel Yarhinai, was a very pious and trustworthy man, and the people used to deposit with him their money for safe-keeping. Even the money belonging to minor orphans would be entrusted to the care of this pious man.

When Abba died, his son Samuel was not present, and therefore he did not know where his father had hidden away the money that belonged

to strangers. Not being able to repay the money to the orphans upon demand, Samuel was accosted by the people as he passed through the streets. "Here goes the son of a man who ate up the money belonging to poor orphans."

The following night, Samuel dreamt that he went to the graveyard where his father had been buried, and asked: "I am seeking Abba who has departed into this world."

"There are many here by the name of Abba," was the reply.

"I am looking for Abba ben Abba," stated Samuel.

"There are many by that name, too," was the reply.

"I would like to talk to Abba ben Abba, the father of Samuel," said Samuel.

"He has ascended to the Heavenly College," was the reply.

Samuel thereupon ascended to the Heavenly College to look for his father. While waiting there for his father, Samuel noticed the departed R. Levi sitting outside the College, and he inquired: "Why do you stay outside the college?"

R. Levi replied: "I was told by the Heavenly Tribunal: 'For all those years that you failed to visit the college of R. Afes and thereby discouraged that sage, you shall not be permitted to enter the Heavenly College.'"

In the meantime the father of Samuel appeared

on the scene. Samuel noticed that his father was both weeping and laughing at the same time, and he inquired: "Father, why do you cry?"

"I cry because I know that you will be with me here shortly," replied Abba.

"And why do you laugh?" inquired Samuel again.

"I laugh because I know that you are held in high esteem in heaven," answered Abba.

"If I am really held in high esteem," said Samuel, "then let them permit Levi to enter the College."

Levi was immediately admitted into the College, and Samuel asked his father: "Where is the money that was entrusted to you by the orphans and widows?"

"You will find the money hidden in the mill," answered Abba. "The money lying on the top and at the bottom belongs to us, and the money lying in the middle belongs to them."

"For what reason did you arrange it thus?" inquired Samuel.

"I have arranged it in this manner," replied Abba, "in order that the money entrusted into my care by the orphans might always be safe. If money is stolen from the bags lying on the top, it will be our money that is stolen and not from theirs. If some of the coins at the bottom became corroded and useless, it will again be our money that deteriorates, and not theirs."

11. *Rab Huna*

Rab Huna was one of the principal disciples of Rab. At the beginning of his career Huna was so poor that in order to buy wine with which to consecrate the Sabbath, he had to pawn his girdle. But his saintly teacher Rab blessed his disciple, and thereupon Huna became very wealthy.

Huna's learning was so great that he succeeded his teacher Rab as president of the college at Sura, in Babylon. There were thirteen assistant lecturers at the college, who were occupied in teaching the disciples who flocked to college from all countries. When his pupils, after the lecture, shook their garments upon rising from the floor, they raised such a great cloud of dust, that the sky became overcast. Those who were in Palestine, upon noticing the sky overcast, used to say: "Huna's pupils in Babylon have risen from their lesson."

Huna was very generous, and he supported all by himself the great number of pupils that attended his lectures. On a rainy day, he was carried in a gilded litter all over the city. He examined the houses of the poor, and if they happened to have been damaged or demolished by the storm, he had them rebuilt at his own expense.

Every Friday toward dusk, Huna would send out one of his servants to buy out all the vegetables

that had been left in the market. He would then order that the vegetables be cast into the river. Once he was asked: "Why throw the vegetables into the river? Why not distribute it among the poor?"

Huna replied: "If the poor knew that they could get vegetables free, they would make no attempt to purchase any in honor of the Sabbath."

"Why then not feed the vegetables to cattle?" Huna was asked again.

"Food fit to be eaten by human beings should not be fed to cattle," replied Huna.

"Then do not purchase it at all," Huna was advised.

"If the gardeners knew that they could not dispose of their vegetables," replied Huna, "they would not care to bring them to town, and thus there would be none obtainable for the Sabbath."

Whenever Huna sat down to eat, he would throw the doors of his house wide open, and he would announce: "Whoever is hungry, let him enter and eat."

When Huna died his remains were brought to the land of Israel for burial. The sages decided to bury him alongside of R. Hiyya, because both of them spread the knowledge of the Law among many people. When the question arose as to who should bring the coffin into the cave, Rab Haggai

volunteered: "I will bring it in there, because I was one of Hiyya's disciples, and am acquainted with his ways."

As Rab Hagga entered the cave, he found the two sons of R. Hiyya sleeping their eternal sleep next to their father, Judah lying on the right of him and Hezekiah on his left. Judah then said to Hezekiah: "Rise from your place; it is not good manners, for Huna is waiting outside."

Hezekiah rose, and as he rose a column of fire rose with him. Upon seeing that, Rab Hagga became alarmed. He hastily placed the coffin in an erect position, and escaped for his life.

12. *Rabbah bar Nahmani*

Rabbah was a great teacher, and thousands of students flocked to his college to hear his lectures. One day, the emperor was told: "There is a certain teacher among the Jews who attracts a large number of students to his lectures, and thereby prevents them from tilling the soil. The soil remaining uncultivated, the Jews are unable to pay their tax to the government."

The emperor thereupon sent an officer to arrest Rabbah. But Rabbah was informed of the emperor's intentions and he fled the city. Rabbah stayed away for some time and then he returned to Pumbeditha. While at Pumbeditha, the Roman officer, who had been searching for Rabbah, happened to come to the inn where Rabbah stayed.

The Roman officer ordered two drinks, and when the table was removed from his presence, his face became disfigured.

"What shall we do?" pleaded the inn-keeper with Rabbah. "This man is a government official, and we shall be punished severely for that."

"Put the table back where it stood," advised Rabbah, "and give him another cup of wine to drink."

The advice of Rabbah was followed, and the face of the Roman officer assumed its natural shape. The Roman officer thereupon said: "I am convinced that the man I am looking for is found in this house, because I can feel the effect of his learning and wisdom."

The officer then made a search for Rabbah and discovered him in the inn. Thereupon he said to Rabbah: "I will not surrender you to the government now. But I will lock you in one of the rooms of the inn, and I will go to Rome. If I am threatened with the punishment of death for my failure to arrest you, I will forfeit my life rather than give you up. But if I am put to torture, I shall give you up to the government."

The officer accordingly locked Rabbah up in one of the rooms of the inn, and he himself went back to Rome. But Rabbah prayed to God that He give him his freedom, and sure enough one of the walls collapsed and the prisoner escaped. He fled to a meadow out of town where he found the

stump of a palm-tree. On this stump Rabbah sat down to rest and to study the Law.

While Rabbah sat there, a dispute arose in the Heavenly College about a certain question of law concerning plagues. The Holy One, blessed be His name, decided it one way, and all the members of the Heavenly College decided it the other way.

"Who shall decide this question?" asked the members of the Heavenly College.

"Let Rabbah settle this dispute," was the reply given. "For he is a great authority on all questions concerning plagues."

So they sent a messenger, the Angel of Death, to get the soul of Rabbah. But Rabbah was sitting on the stump of the palm-tree and studying incessantly, so that the Angel of Death was unable to come near him. Finally a strong wind blew which caused a noise among the rushes of the meadow. Rabbah thought that it was the clatter of the hoofs of horses, and he said: "Roman soldiers are coming to seize me. It is much better for me to die by the hand of the Angel of Death, than to fall into the hands of the government."

At the moment the soul of Rabbah was about to depart, he exclaimed: "It is clean." That is, he decided in favor of the opinion of the Holy One, blessed be His name.

A heavenly voice was then heard saying: "Happy art thou, Rabbah bar Nahmani, for thy

body is pure, and thy soul departed while pronouncing the word 'clean.' ”

Thereupon a note fell down from heaven in Pumbeditha which read: “Rabbah bar Nahmani was requested to come to the Heavenly College.”

All the sages at once left town to look for the remains of Rabbah, but they were unable to find it. At last they came to a meadow, and there they noticed a flock of birds assembled in one place, with their wings spread out, yet standing still. The sages said to one another: “He is surely over there in that place.”

The sages walked over to that spot, and there they found the remains of Rabbah. They buried him with every mark of honor and dignity, and they mourned for him three days and three nights. When they were about to depart, a written note fell down from heaven which read: “Whoever departs now shall be excommunicated.”

The sages then mourned to the end of seven days, when a written note fell down from heaven, announcing: “Now you may go to your homes in peace.”

On the day Rabbah died, a violent storm arose. An Arab was riding his camel along the Pappa canal in Babylonia, and the strong wind lifted the rider and threw him to the other side of the canal. “What is the cause of this?” asked the Arab.

“It is because of the death of Rabbah bar Nahmani,” was the reply.

The Arab thereupon raised his eyes to heaven and said: "Master of the world! The whole world is Thine, and so is Rabbah bar Nahmani Thine. Thou art Rabbah's, and Rabbah is Thine. Wherefore shouldst Thou destroy the whole world?"

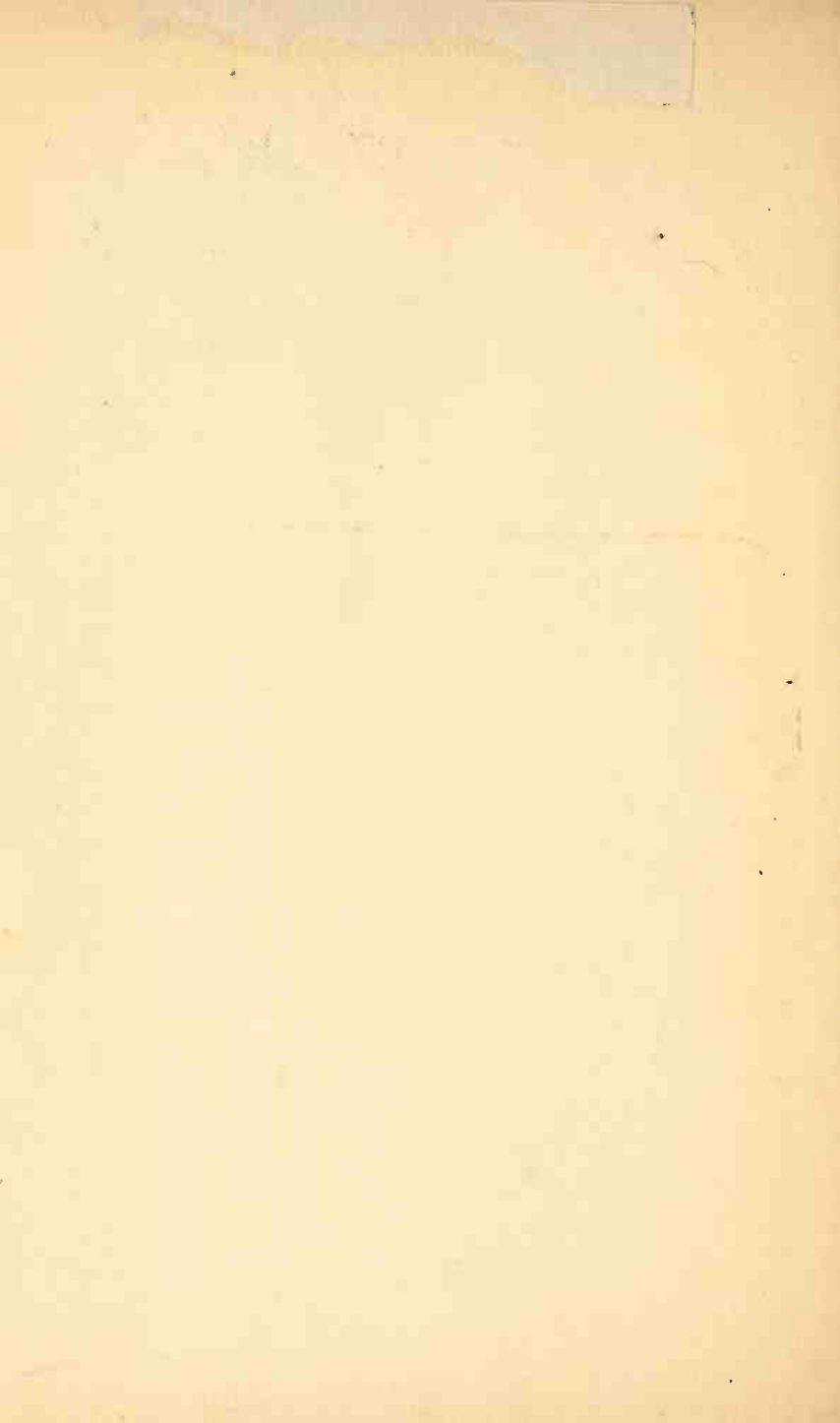
At once the violent storm subsided.

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